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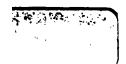
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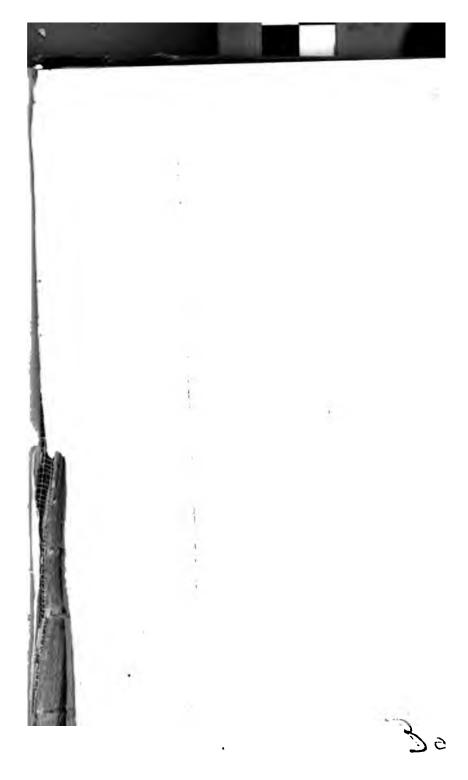
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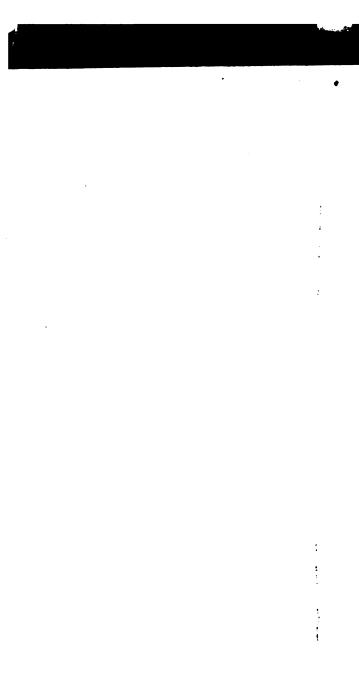
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THE DRAGNET

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THE DRAGNET

BY EVELYN SNEAD BARNETT

NEW YORK

B. W. HUEBSCH

1909

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TO' EMERIN AND UDOLPHO IN MEMORY OF HAPPY HOURS IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

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THE DRAGNET

PART I

THE FISHERMAN AND THE CASTING

CHAPTER I

TWO WEDDINGS

BEFORE strangers had been five minutes in Constance Parker's society, they invariably received two strong impressions — one of her innocence, the other of her beauty. That she was unconscious of the first goes without saying, but she was proud of the second; not with the pride of vanity, rather of race. She held her dark hair, fair skin, blue-gray eyes, and her strong young form, as an inheritance, just as she regarded her old home, set squat and square in the heart of Lewiston, feeling that all had come to her from the pioneer days down through decades of accruing wealth, comfort and refinement.

The same beauty that the girl possessed was shown, though mellowed, in Miss Sarah Parker, joint heir to the Parker estate and aunt to Constance. Constance wondered if at fifty she would look as young as her aunt, when she discovered that at twenty-two the trouble that had lately come

and, as a first step, to burn the letter or who had brought the creases. She tely to her desk, and took out bundle es, all with violet seals and a trace of the could recognize the brand any scept the last, which had been written paper, written in question, agitation, entreaty for justice. She laughed now aught the word.

tter written the day before she said yes, l, smiling tenderly. She would keep atever had happened later, when that she had been loved. No, it must go it! But she sobbed as she gave it up. a frenzy the others followed — dried we — catching easily the flame, as easian had been caught by a new flame. onstance wondered in unsparing self-vas it because Arthur Cabell had been cause he had he

kimono, with her brown hair in two braids, she might have posed for the latest fashion in negligées.

"I have come to tell you, Constance, before you hear it from outsiders, that I am going to be married."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah, I am so glad! I thought —"

"I know, child; everybody did. But he's been a widower four years now, and I realized long ago that I had made a mistake. You see, it wasn't so much what he did as what he was: every man is bound to show some little attentions to other girls sometimes, and women are fools to think it anything vital. By himself I liked him better than all the others, but with people he mortified me. Why, the very way he used to change his fork from one hand to the other or take his soup from the tip of his spoon — though I have since learned that that was because of his mustache — made me wince. Of course it was foolish, but such things seemed then all-important. Fate has been kind. He married that dear little Bessie Lane, and he's seen the world. So have I. Now," she concluded, solemnly, "he might even drink his coffee out of his saucer, and I'd not think it criminal."

Constance laughed. "It may be the thing to do some day; customs change so."

"Yes," replied her aunt, still intensely serious, all the old fashions are coming back. Some of

How sudden, and how exciting!"
be quiet, of course—at my age—
itend being married in white just as a been some years ago. A woman is a bride but once."

ou won't go away from me? The know, is your home as long as you live." such of the furniture is mine outright. if you should get married and wish to us would be but natural, then we may parate; otherwise things can go on just

ersion was most beneficial to Constance. her back to real life and the world. net a diplomatic envoy from Arthur listened to his portrayal of the real his friend and his pleading for rein-

is no telling — with her aunt's ex-

comrade, his nurse. Her mother had been dead fifteen years, and she had no near relations but her aunt. Constance did not know the least little bit about men. In time she might have been persuaded to think differently, but two months after her aunt's marriage she met Charles Alexander. As the stranger bowed in the introduction, she noticed the steadfast look in his eyes. Indistinctly she noted other characteristics — his rather slim, though good figure, flexible hands, neatly-shod feet, his olive skin, his intellectual forehead but in a second she came back to the eyes. They were good, true eyes that she felt had never shown fear. Though, in defiance of conventions, he had remained near her the rest of the evening, when he asked permission to call, she wondered at her ready consent.

After that, she met him everywhere. When she acknowledged to herself that she liked to be with this man, when she realized that his companionship brought her a feeling of rest, she was puzzled. It was evident, she reflected, that her one experience had not disturbed her belief in the good; otherwise she was surely the vainest of women, for there was balm, there was assuagement, in being wooed thus. She felt that Charles was different from that other man, although her no was positive.

Then said the suitor, smiling and not a whit cast down:

eted sword that had supposedly been ; my reach."

Do you compare me to a sword?" aske ice, amused.

I do indeed," he answered, in bold gallith you by my side, I could conqueld."

'Another reason for my no, I don't lil g. If you wish to fight, join the army."
'Too late now. My father was a soldier all else at promise of war, and follow ce a warlike trade. My spirit seeks a ting that of war, it shows itself in never quered by obstacles. I won't take your r' But you must."

But I won't." And Charles persisted theries of emphatic noes, without retreating nout giving offense.

hen said Constance: "Why are you we on me? From if T

herself as to him. He replied in frank earnestness:

"My love is forever; it is willing to take the chances in spite of the 'dead heart.'"

This put Constance in desperate straits; she spoke plain truths to herself and to Charles.

"My mind is made up," said he. "I feel, I know, we can make each other supremely happy. You are sensitive over your first disillusioning, that is all; marry me and you will forget all about it."

"Are you sure?" she asked naïvely.

He was. He told himself he was sure over and over again; for there was a little something — a flush, a certain pleasure when he approached, proving that if she did not love, she did not hate.

So Constance fought another fight, recalling bravely her romantic, rapturous first love, the days of beginnings that no two had ever felt so freshly, the tender meetings, the kisses on hands, on hair, on lips — why had she not known better? If she said yes, must she tell Charles of those kisses? She shivered, but she told him, as she said the word that was to make him happy forever and ever.

Then she found temporary peace. She was so sure of Charles, and there were new sensations in this engagement, because the men were so different. Charles was calm and sane; Cabell had been all storm and exaggeration. And then Constance was vain. She liked to be awakened in the morning by the offering of new-gathered flowers, to find

nestling beneath gorgeous roses the one little, suggestive orange-bloom, and beside it the lover's thought penned the last hour before he slept.

Though agog, society was also somewhat aggrieved over the engagement. Even her best friend, Diana Frewe, did not know why she had broken with Arthur Cabell. To be sure, Diana lived with her brother a thousand miles away, and there are things one cannot write.

There are also things one can. Charles showed Constance a letter he had written to his partner, George Trezevant, absent in the firm's interest, amusing her by the manner in which he had mixed business and sentiment:

" Dear George: -

"You had better close that deal and come home, if you don't want the business to go to smash. Have signed contract with Gerald & Co. at prices quoted in letter of 3d, but doubt my wisdom. You see a man doesn't find a priceless pearl every day, and my luck has so turned my brain that iron fluctuations seem trivial. We won't do anything about Vendire and those fellows until I can investigate; there is some scheme afloat, the market is perplexing, so unless we can get some inside information we'll keep in sight of land. I hear they intend forming a central combination, taking a slice of territory from Chicago to the Gulf — our own particular preserves — and they

want us to join. There'll be time enough after I get back; I never like to go into things in a hurry. Business or no business, George, you must be back in time for the 10th. This is my one wedding day, and my best partner has to be my best man, even though he has to leave things and afterwards do double work while I am living in a dream."

And Constance added:

"Besides, the beautiful maid of honor, Miss Diana Frewe, expects you."

But why, with three hundred and sixty-five days at her service, did Constance happen to choose the 10th of February for her wedding? If she had taken the 8th, or even the 9th, they would have been in New York on the 10th, and Charles might have attended a business meeting. It would not have made the slightest difference to her; yet it might have saved at least one life, one mind, and four and a half years of war to the knife. This was the meeting for the organization of the American Blade and Trigger Company. While Charles, standing before the priest, was saying earnestly, "I will," Luck was standing aside, laughing, and saying, "I won't."

CHAPTER II

THE DINNER

THE Alexanders shortened their honeymoon, and Constance bestirred herself in house-hunting and furnishing; for in accordance with the agreement between the aunt and niece, they were to live apart. Charles smiled over the arrangement, but it was perfectly satisfactory to the principals. Aunt Sarah and Constance were to occupy the old home alternately, for ten years at a time, unless Constance should have children, who, of course, must be born and brought up mid the Parker traditions.

Never in her life had Constance lived in a rented house, and the prospect seemed queer. She did not let any one suspect that she choked every time she went through the high, iron gates that had opened and closed to so many generations of Parkers. When a home was found, she could hardly bring herself to fix a date for moving; and she went about her preparations most unwillingly at first, though she finally came to feel a thrilling interest in the task.

Constance stayed awake all of that last night in

the old home, when familiar things spoke to her and begged her not to leave. In the morning, as she walked down the long path between the elms, even the old holly bush laid a detaining hand on her, so that she entered her new house with rent garments.

But the poignancy of regret soon lessened in the novelties of the modern menage. About two weeks after their return to Lewiston, Charles was fingering at his own latch, when, before he could turn the key, the door was opened by Constance herself.

"The first real home-coming," she cried, gayly, "for I do not count all the days of unpacking and muss. We are now ready to begin house-keeping in earnest. Isn't it lovely? I have done nothing but go out and come in to get effects. The things were pretty enough when we chose them from such a lot, but here by themselves they seem ever so much handsomer."

"It is always so," he replied; "when you were mixed up with all the other girls, I thought you were fine, but since I bought you and brought you home—"

Constance put her hand over his mouth; she could not allow such talk even in jest.

After a dainty first dinner, Charles rose with a sigh, saying:

"I wish I could stay but those men made me promise."

I 2

"You are not going out this first evening!" pouted Constance.

"I have to. It's those Trust people. I have missed the other meetings and it seems important. And by the bye, my dear, I would like to ask them all here to dinner. Shall I say Wednesday?"

"Yes, indeed! Then I can meet the great Ven-

dire, the head of - what is it?"

"The American Blade and Trigger Company. And Diana? Get Diana. George Trezevant is crazy about her."

Mr. Vendire and the other directors were glad to see Charles. All that had been previously accomplished was shown under a fine glaze. president regretted that Alexander and Company had not been represented from the first. needed Mr. Alexander's acumen, his name. now there was a place waiting for him on the ground floor, and the ground floor of the new corporation was a big thing. It consisted of shares amounting to twice the value of the individual firm's capital stock plus double the amount of that firm's gross - mind you - gross profits for the preceding five years. But take notice, this offer is limited to firms entering the new corporation now: after the first of December, if a firm should wish to to come in, it must be only as an outside stockholder.

"As I understand, however, to take advantage of this ground floor proposition Alexander and

Company will have to give up its identity and be a branch," said Charles.

"Just so; but a branch bigger than the parent tree. We intend to limit variety and increase quantity, the market pulse controlling the output. By such union of forces we can erect a few enormous factories, and manufacture goods so cheaply that in trying to compete with us, all the little firms will be smashed. Then up go prices, bringing big dividends. A few years will see every mother's son of us a millionaire!" And unconsciously Horace Vendire stretched out a closed fist, as if grasping a scepter.

Charles demurred. "Suppose you directors should elect to turn any of us out of our own factories? You have arrogated that power; you could throw us out, fill our places with strangers, deprive us of a lifelong occupation, and we could not object."

"Very true," replied Vendire, "but you would have your stock and could either live on your dividends or sell out and start in something besides blades and triggers; for, of course, we have a clause to prevent that sort of competition."

"So we would lose not only our occupation but the experience of a lifetime," remarked Charles, and then he was silent.

"Do you expect to grind away the rest of your life?" asked Vendire. "This would be only retiring on a fortune."

"I hope to die in harness," said Charles. "I would far rather wear out than rust out. Alexander and Company has seen some pretty close calls in its day, in times of panic and times of peace, but it is now in a smooth sea near a safe port. I have been trained for my place and no other, so I do not relish the idea of losing my identity and becoming a branch of a corporation of corporations. I understand that you yourselves are one of three?"

"Yes, but entirely independent of one another. In the beginning we met to divide territory. We go ahead now in our own field, in our own section, which is our kingdom to govern as we choose."

"I shall have to think it over;" said Charles, "and of course will not intrude to-day. Thursday is the next meeting?" Then he gave his invitation to dinner with ill-concealed young-husband's pride and went home to his wife.

Constance never forgot that dinner. Aunt Sarah attended to the material part; though she declined to be present and sniffed at the names of the guests, declaring that mixtures were social errors, and that she did not approve of policy dinners.

The niece admitted that as far as she could learn the stranger guests were new types, but Charles said that meeting men socially often helped his judgment commercially. It was possible he might have to be intimately associated in business with these men, and he wished to know something of their minds and manners.

It was not altogether the men that made the dinner memorable. It was Diana Frewe. Diana had been a center. Constance didn't mind that, as Diana always managed to be a center — that is, she did not manage, she just was — but Diana had been dramatic, and Constance hated dramatics.

The friendship between the girls had been formed at school. Constance's faithfulness, not Diana's idealism, had made it lasting. Constance said things that no one else dared; but she said them from love, not malice, and the quick Diana had seen the difference, and had taken Constance for her friend for all time.

It was always Diana's part to take, not be taken; she had the supreme power of attracting love. Constance often wondered if the secret of her fascination was not the keen interest she took in people and a certain ready comprehension. Diana herself said it was not the interest; it was because she listened. "It does not matter what people talk about, I long ago made up my mind that I had to listen."

In spite of this power, her faults, her weaknesses were patent. She was vain, she was so imaginative that she was unreal, and in common with most women who fascinate she was not always truthful. She had a strain of romance, but she did not take it seriously, as did Constance, for she always kept

her head. She knew precisely the effects she could produce; never yet had a proposal of marriage found her unprepared.

Constance did not approve of Diana's attitude towards men, because Constance herself was too single-minded to understand it. She thought her friend abused her powers in trifling with deep feelings; and Diana admitted that she saw in every man a possible lover; that her chief pleasure in life was to make men care for her, and that she had no conscience about fascinating other girls' admirers.

After her marriage, Constance had become more than ever severe. Having never, even in her girlhood days, approved of flirtation, and being now armed with that amusing new dignity that besets young wives — a sweet sort of assumption half fearful that it will not be conceded a full measure of respect, and conscious that it does not quite deserve it she added new exactions born of superior experience. When she invited Diana to dinner, she praised George Trezevant, whom Diana had met, gave a hearsay report of Horace Vendire's impenetrability and power, and ended with an emphatic request that Diana would be careful.

"Some day retribution is going to overtake you," said Constance, "and the past lovers will be avenged. I warn you, Mr. Vendire is not a man with whom to trifle."

"I shall be just as careful as ever," replied

Diana, flippantly, and Constance recognized the folly of objecting.

Still, as if with premonition, on the evening of the dinner she ventured a last injunction, before they went down to the pretty drawing-room to greet their guests.

The first thing Constance saw when she entered the room was a man's profile against a dark curtain; and though all the men were strangers, she knew in a moment that this was Horace Vendire and that she was not going to like him. Yet handsome, indeed, he was; with the most regular features outside of marble that she had ever seen, and with hair like the "flock of goats" in Solomon's Song. Before she had time either to notice or greet her other guests, Diana claimed her attention.

The girl had entered with the well-known look of conscious unconsciousness; Charles had introduced her; she had thrown one glance at Horace Vendire, and he had met it. Then, instead of the smile that always followed the play of her eyes — a sweet, delicate sort of smile, half pensive and wholly beguiling — she had gasped, turned white, and abruptly left the room.

Provoked, Constance excused herself and followed. There was nothing else for a hostess to do. She found Diana alone upstairs, trembling, in tears, and she asked her a trifle impatiently, thinking of her overdone dinner, if she were ill. "I see you think I am acting!" exclaimed Diana. "Have I ever acted silly? The sight of that man has affected me in the strangest manner!"

The accompanying tears were so real that Constance was forced to believe in the emotion, and

pressed her hand to encourage explanation.

"You can laugh all you choose, Constance. I cannot even tell what your Mr. Vendire looks like, for when he took my hand an awful thing blotted out everything else. Don't think me crazy, but it was all on account of the tuberose." The last words were half sob, half laugh.

"The tuberose? What do you mean?"

"Didn't you see it in his coat? The sight or smell always brings death to my mind, but this time it was far worse — a vivid apparition — Oh, Constance! — a misty vision of a long, stretchedout form, lying crushed and bleeding."

Diana was now weeping hysterically, and Constance herself could not help shuddering, when fortunately Charles, who had come up in time to hear the last words, interfered.

"Is that all?" he cried, cheerily. "The tuberose shall be removed in short order; so dry your eyes, come down, and let us have dinner."

As they promised to obey, he preceded them to banish the offending flower, and when the two entered, with brief apology, all was externally serene.

Constance placed Mr. Vendire at her right, opposite Diana, who sat next to George Trezevant. She soon saw she need not exert herself to lead the conversation, as the guest of honor would not be at a loss for topics.

He began by saying: "What curiously highstrung creatures you are! To certain magnetic women, a glance, a sound, an odor are tragedies. How white she looked!"

At this remark Constance saw George turn red, and knew he had heard. Had Diana? Constance could not tell, for her friend was past-mistress in the look unconscious. She thought a change of subject safe.

When she recalled afterwards the significance of much of the conversation, Constance wondered. Surely a business dinner was something anomalous. As if by preconcert, the strangers made the talk general by citing the trend of the day towards consolidation. Then from one to another the ball was thrown, and stories told of men who miss the turn of the tide. She never dreamed what was meant. It is true, she realized that the men were striving for something, but she was so occupied with Diana and her problems that she failed to see what it was, and remarked at random that she for one did not believe in trusts.

- "Wait until you fight one," said Mr. Claws.
- "We can control a pretty large territory, which we cannot lose in a day," replied Charles for her.

"We may build a large factory and divide it," said Mr. Vendire.

"It would mean war to the knife," responded Charles, and to Constance his manner recalled his persistent wooing. But she knew so little about trusts that she thought the men were joking, and the threat sounded far from dire.

She scanned the faces at her table and saw the mark of the world. Compared with these impenetrable masks, Charles was as clear as light. He would speak truth because it was truth; the others merely as a convenience to an end. And here she felt a sentiment that was not love, for her heart still shrined her first romance, but a feeling that has been many a woman's salvation — loyalty to the man whose name she bears, and an instinct where his welfare is concerned. Out of it came intense desire that Charles should have nothing to do with these men, and a consequent resolution.

Diana, her old self again, sat demurely opposite Horace Vendire, by George Trezevant's side, with a graceful turning from one to the other. The effect on the two men was antipodal. George was as a dumb schoolboy, but Horace talked brilliantly, and for every glance from Diana returned one equally intent, so that before the dinner ended, Constance had ill omens in plenty.

How glad and how tired she was when it was

all over! As the door closed upon their guests, she turned to her husband, saying:

"I don't like it at all."

quoted Charles.

- "What don't you like?"
- "Any of those men, but above all Horace Vendire, and the beginning between him and Diana. Diana sometimes provokes me; she tries to fascinate."
 - "'The lack of lovely pride in her
 Who strives to please, my pleasure numbs,"

"It isn't a lack of pride," retorted Constance, "it is just her nature. She can't help it, and in spite of it she is dear; but I feel creepy and uneasy, because George has lost his head over her and he is so good and so true that I am afraid it will stay lost."

"Poor George, and he had such a good start at the wedding."

"I thought something would really come of it but now —"

"Hang Horace Vendire!" cried Charles, rudely.

CHAPTER III

PASTORALE

A FTER much serious discussion, Alexander and Company decided to keep out of the proposed consolidation. It might mean a fight but that was nothing unusual. They were always fighting small firms and if the trust declared war the small firms would not figure at all. Instead of a hundred competitors, they would have only one. Vendire and his crowd were going to think some time before fighting. For every dollar the Alexander firm lost, they stood to lose a hundred.

Alexander and Company treated the trust as any other competitor, meeting its members to discuss trade conditions and finally inducing them to sign a scale which, without promising phenomenal dividends, would insure reasonable profits. Trade grew steadily. Constance and Charles laughed when they referred to past anxiety, and remembered the importance they had attached to the question of joining the combination. Evidently there would be no fight.

Then the war with Spain brought business of which they had never dreamed — government contracts, foreign contracts, shops running day and

night. At the end of a few months both partners were thin and nervous from overwork. In spite of Charles's protest, Constance sent for a doctor, who pronounced her husband on the point of a breakdown, but opined that fresh air, exercise and shorter hours, would soon set him right again. He advised horseback. Charles tried it, but found that the daily ride and its necessary extra toilet took time that he could not spare, so he compromised on a wheel.

Aunt Sarah was shocked. "I did not know anybody but clerks rode wheels now-a-days," said she. "Why doesn't he get an automobile?"

"It wouldn't give him the same exercise," explained Constance, "and plenty of gentlemen ride wheels; Mr. Vendire himself has one, and says that no exercise has ever so benefited him.

"Does Mr. Vendire ride a wheel?" asked the lady, mollified; for even at this time Mr. Vendire was reputed a possible seven-figure man.

But soon Charles was too busy even to ride a wheel, and Constance saw him grow more nervous, worried and irritable. She sent for George Trezevant and spoke her mind about their working so hard.

George admitted that the firm had more business than two men could handle and said they were considering the expediency of taking another man and were even then on the lookout.

"And it is not so much a question of capital

as capacity," he concluded. "What we want is a smart, strong man, unafraid of work."

When this became known there were applicants not a few. Finally there came a well-recommended, young bachelor called Fred. Y. Poppy, a fat little limping Northerner recently arrived in Lewiston. When Constance first heard he was being considered she vaguely remembered that her old lover had once mentioned meeting him and though the impression was somehow prejudicial she could not recall in what connection. So negative was it, however, that she forbore to mention it, especially as prominent business men spoke highly of Poppy.

The company was reorganized, with Charles as president, Trezevant as vice-president, and Poppy as superintendent. The new man started in bravely. He was a worker, and a good one, all eyes, and in spite of his build, one of the kind that nothing seems to fatigue. He had not been in the firm two weeks before he reported that the American Blade and Trigger Company had captured one of Alexander's oldest and best customers, and all knew then that the fight was on.

Charles redoubled his efforts. Work by itself never kills, but work with worry does, and he was worried. As if by preconcert, all of his enemies began to attack — small firms and large. He strongly suspected that some of those claiming to be independent were really members of the Trust,

as agreements could not be made and kept with them as in former days. His health again suffered. Poppy and Trezevant did their best to relieve him, but he was the final court of all decisions.

Then Poppy had a happy thought. He called on Mrs. Alexander with a suggestion:

"We are greatly concerned about your husband's overworking, and it occurred to me that, as he won't take a vacation, he could get the benefit of one if he would consent to move to the country for the summer. There he would have quiet, pure air, and would be forced to keep shorter business hours. I proposed it to him, but he says you don't like the country and your pleasure comes first, so I have ventured to tell you, as he seems to favor the idea."

"It is kind and good of you," replied Constance, with an inward shiver. To most women the country means loneliness, and, while professing to like other people's country homes, Constance had never wanted one of her own; still she said she was willing to do anything that would make Charles rest.

That evening, when her husband came home, bringing George, and found her advocating the change with seeming enthusiasm, his face shone with a happy light.

Everybody seemed to have a place to sell — a fact causing unspoken reflection to Constance.

Poppy was most active in the search, but each proposition disclosed some insuperable objection. Finally Charles announced that the ideal was found, and led them all to inspect a hill seven or eight miles out on the Lee turnpike. The air was pure, the views superb. The deed was made out in Constance's name and presented with appropriate ceremony. Constance had something she had never wanted, but Charles was as happy as a boy.

There were no dwellings on the place — an advantage in Constance's eyes, as they could put up buildings to suit themselves. These caused rapt discussion.

"We must go slow," said Charles; "I'm not quite sure what the Trust is going to do to us, and one can sink a lot of money in a country-place. Why don't you like that last plan?"

"The arrangement of things is rather nice," admitted Constance, "but the rooms are entirely too small; they should be at least four feet larger each way. You say they are cozy? Who wants to be cozy in the country? One wants space. Whoever heard of a sitting-room fifteen by fifteen?"

"But you will have all outdoors for a sittingroom." Then Charles made stupid calculations to show her the cost of enlarging the plan.

"Aunt Sarah says that it is no better than a day-laborer's cottage; that I shall be most uncomfortable."

- "Is Aunt Sarah going to live in it?"
- "Of course she isn't," said Constance, offended.
- "Don't misunderstand me. As you well know, I think Aunt Sarah wonderful, but I married you, and when you depend on her judgment instead of on mine I feel hurt. You don't know how conventional she is, because you're inclined that way yourself. You are learning, but she gets worse all the time."

Constance was generous. "You are right; no one can tell what we need and can afford but ourselves. I realize that it would not be wise to sink much capital in our place, as the day may come when we may need it to win a big fight."

Events justified Charles, for it was not long before he had news of a whole drove of customers going over to the American Blade and Trigger Company; and he had a heavier blow in the loss of one of his very best city salesmen — one of the few men who had been identified with the firm since its founding.

Constance was glad she had listened to reason. A little cottage was built, of five rooms, with an outdoor kitchen; a plain barn and stable were added. The spirit of economy being roused, she suggested giving up the town house; they could spend the short winter months at an hotel.

Moving was a painfully new experience to Constance. She now saw to what an extent she had depended on her aunt. The packing and handling

were not a little tiresome, and Charles was too busy to be even appealed to; but she got through somehow, and one morning when Charles kissed her good-bye, she cautioned him to leave the shops early, so as to be on time for his first dinner in his country home.

When, after a delightful spin on his wheel, he rounded the hill, somewhat breathless from the exertion of the climb, he was truly alarmed. Several great trunks graced the lawn, the head of Constance's brass bed rested against the chestnut tree, the dining-table stood on its head in the middle of the prospective tennis court, while his pride, his air-tight, one-piece wardrobe, wrapped in an eiderdown comfort, with a stout rope round its middle, was swinging from a block and tackle fastened to the cottage roof. Not a wagon was in sight.

"What on earth is the matter?" he called anxiously, as, after wandering vainly, his eye at last singled out his wife in the confusion, lying, as if she had given up all hope in life, upon a sofa on the front porch.

"Matter enough; most of these things that you see will not get into your little, old, low gloors. We tried to get them through the upstairs windows, but they are ridiculously small also, which is why your wardrobe is hanging Judas like."

"I didn't dream you would try to bring all these

things out," he protested, somewhat sore over the adjectives. "I thought we agreed to pass the summer in a simple way, using only the stuff absolutely necessary."

Constance replied, rather tartly:

"If you can find anything here that we do not actually need, I wish you would kindly point it out."

Charles's eye roved, stopped on a large and handsome Buhl table. "I suppose it wouldn't be possible to pass the summer without that thing," he said.

Does the woman live who can hear a real Buhl called a thing?

"My best lamp has to stand on top," said Constance, with congealing features. "If there is one thing we shall need in the country it is lamps, and lamps demand stands."

Charles recalled the Sevres and ormolu affair that gave so little light and so much smoke, but held his peace. "How about that?" he said, indicating a huge bronze vase on a pedestal.

"How like a man!" cried Constance, perilously near losing her temper. "You forget the many times you have wanted strings, and have found them of any length, strength, or quality in that very jar!"

Charles made a counter attack.

"How many loads did you bring out?"

"Seven."

"And did you think seven loads of furniture would get into a five-room cottage?"

At this, the worm turned. "They would if you had taken my advice and built everything larger. Let us pray it won't rain, as my best things have to roost outdoors to-night. To-morrow the men are coming to move them back to town. I begged them to do it to-night, but they refused to lift a hand because they heard an owl hoot on the way out, and an owl by daylight, they said, is a bad sign. You will have to see about storage the first thing to-morrow, and then we can have the pleasure of buying things that will get up your narrow, crooked stairs, through your dwarfish doors."

Charles felt really guilty. Aunt Sarah would have been of great help here, and he had thrown this inexperienced gifl on her limited judgment. "I should have thought of the size of the furniture," he said, in disarming meekness. "The money I shall have to spend on storage and new furniture would have more than paid for larger rooms."

Generosity always conquered Constance. "Do not worry, dear," said she; "I'll attend to the storing, and will buy the very cheapest things."

Constance was determined to learn, and that was half the battle. Aunt Sarah came out, and smiled grimly at Charles's wardrobe and the cherished

brass bed in the front room downstairs that had been intended for the sitting-room.

"You see, aunt, they couldn't get them upstairs, so I had to take this room for my bedroom. I can lie in bed and look out over the lawn and at that lovely edge of locust trees over there on the cliff all night."

"Which may or may not be an advantage," said Aunt Sarah. "What are you going to do for a sitting-room?"

"We are building one back of the dining-room. After all, it is the best place; and now I have the extra room upstairs."

"Humph!" said Aunt Sarah. It was very kind of her not to say more.

Diana came, and pronounced things "just too cute," and wore shepherdess hats, and dressed her hair with June roses. George Trezevant came too, but his visit was in no wise the success his friends had planned. Constance understood his feeling, and sympathized. She saw him extravagantly in love with Diana, but too modest and self-distrustful to hope. The girl's graciousness was but her native politeness; he could not construe it into special selection. Constance was sitting with him on the lawn the evening of his arrival, listening to Diana's playing indoors, when he confided:

"She's made a fool of me, but I can't help it. She has that indescribable something that makes men lose their minds over even a plain woman, but in connection with her delicacy, her sensitiveness, it is irresistible. Do you think she will ever love me?"

"How can you tell until you ask? She may love you now."

George shook his head. "I dare not put it to the test. She is kind to me, but not by the rosiest argument can I translate her kindness into encouragement. I cannot speak. It would only make our intercourse constrained, and give me a desperate certainty in place of a distant hope."

"Why aren't you as natural with her as with me? The moment she comes near, you change; you have — pardon me — fits of dumbness."

"I know it; I can't think of anything to say."

"Because you are striving to be unnaturally clever. Be yourself, George; she must hear the true ring. No matter how we talk, our real selves always show in the end; it is the genuine that conquers."

Here Charles joined them, and the two men with pipes of comfort stretched themselves in steamer chairs, until George, knocking the ashes from the bowl, made a flimsy excuse to go into the house, leaving Constance with her husband under the stars. Charles reached out for her hand, but she pretended not to see it in the darkness, and began talking of Diana and George.

No, she really couldn't tell whether George had any grounds for hope or not. She sighed.

"Diana has changed; she no longer tells me everything; something has come between us."

"Perhaps I am the something; two girls can never be quite the same to each other after one marries."

- "I should hate to think that. I have not changed. If possible, I love her more than I ever did."
 - "But surely you do not tell her everything."
 - "Naturally your affairs are not mine to tell."
- "See how unreasonable you are. You yourself have changed, yet you cannot accept a change in her as natural."
- "It isn't the same thing at all. She is in trouble, is worrying about something. It is some friend or foe with whom she corresponds, and—it's a man."
 - "Of course it is!"
- "Nothing of the sort! That is always the way with you men; you think every masculine correspondent a girl has, a lover. These are anything but love-letters."
- "May I ask, since she hasn't confided, how you happen to know?"
- "Because she doesn't go off by herself to answer them that is, not all of them; she sits in the room with me, and just writes."
- "How often does she get these mysterious letters?"
 - "I try not to keep count, for she is my guest and

my friend, and I don't wish to pry, but somehow I always seem to know when they come. I must say, she never conceals them; so, you see, in spite of trying not to, I do know."

"I see all that, but how often?"

"They have no regularity; sometimes only one in a week, but yesterday she got two."

"That was wearing, wasn't it?"

"Charles Alexander, if you are going to talk that way—as if I were devoured by curiosity about my dearest friend's private affairs—I'll never mention her again to you as long as I live."

"Don't sit so far away from me. Who ever accused you of curiosity? Of course, Diana must not feel that she's being scrutinized and gossiped about, but why not make it easy for her to confide? Perhaps she doesn't wish to force her private worries on you, because you have been having those headaches lately."

But here Constance suddenly discovered that it was too damp to sit out, and left him to finish his pipe alone.

The next morning a letter came at the sight of which Diana, instead of being cool, showed agitation. Furthermore, she retired to her room to read it.

Constance sewed and waited, glad to have something to take her thoughts from herself. After some time Diana reappeared, equipped for walk-

ing. She explained that she had a letter to mail, and, needing a walk, would take it to the village herself.

When after some little time she returned, Constance said:

"Excuse me, dear, but do you need help in any way? I cannot fail to see that something is worrying you, and, while I don't wish to force your confidence, I want to help you."

Diana threw impulsive arms around her. "I wish I could tell you, but I cannot. I haven't tried to conceal that I have a secret, have I? But even were I at liberty to confide, I don't know whether I would, for it is something you wouldn't like."

"Even if I disapproved, I wouldn't change. What is friendship if not given for all time—that is, if one cannot be a friend in spite of difference of opinion?"

"Dear heart, I wish I could tell you," said Diana. "That I cannot isn't altogether my fault. I do not know why, but in the beginning I was bound to a secrecy from which I am not allowed to withdraw."

"I am sorry," said Constance, simply, "but remember, if you need help or advice, you can ask either without explaining."

A part of the secret was revealed when Charles arrived that evening with a curious expression on his face. "I passed through the village this afternoon, and Mr. Owen gave me this," he said, holding out a letter to Diana.

"The second to-day," said Constance teasingly, but neither of her hearers smiled.

Diana took the letter, turning from red to pale and looked furtively at Charles as she left the room.

- "It isn't a love-affair, as you imagined, Charles," said Constance; "and while I have no right to surmise, I am sure it is some money trouble. She's in some strait, needs money, and would rather die than ask for it. What should I do?"
- "Was the letter I just brought from the same person who has been writing so constantly?"

"It was; what of it?"

- "Then, my love, you can make yourself easy about your friend's money troubles. I am not prepared to say who wrote the inside of that letter, but the address is in a hand I have seen fifty times."
- "You don't say so! But perhaps, as she didn't choose to tell me, you ought not."
- "But I think you should know. The handwriting is Horace Vendire's. How about that love-affair now?"
- "But Charles, how can it be! She hardly knows him, and besides there is nothing about her like a girl in love. If it were only a love-affair,

she would tell me. She is her own mistress, and anybody in the world can write to her. If Mr. Vendire does so, depend upon it he is leading her into some crookedness. It is most alarming!"

"Few would agree with you. Almost any girl would have her head turned by attentions from Horace Vendire. For some reason he doesn't wish his attentions known, and she, like everybody obeys him. You'll see. If he asks her, she'll marry him."

CHAPTER IV

QUEER NEIGHBORS

A BOUT this time the place next to the Alexander's was bought by a German named Teufelstochter, or rather by his wife — a tall, grenadier sort of a woman with a black mustache — who, it was reported, had friends who had loaned her money for the first payments. Constance, always kind-hearted, sent a servant with a dish of fruit and a neighborly message. She was amazed at having her gift returned with an impertinent reply:

"If Mrs. Alexander was too stuck up to visit with her neighbors but sent niggers to look down on poor people, she'd have her understand that there were some people that no matter how rich they were the Teufelstochters would not touch with

a ten-foot pole!"

"It is most unaccountable!" exclaimed Constance.

"Not at all so," replied Diana. "Haven't you found out by this time that to be refined and educated is to be hated by persons not to the manner born?"

Shortly after this the boundary fence was myste-

riously torn down in the night and the Alexander stock raided the neighboring farm. The broken fence was too suspicious for Charles to say he was sorry for the trespass. He made inquiries about the family in town and heard nothing good. The husband had been a prosperous butcher at one time, but had lost his money and had led a dog's life since his marriage — in fact he had recently instituted suit for divorce and was about leaving for parts unknown.

One morning Constance and Diana were sitting on the front porch when a stranger drove up. Being given to premonitions, Constance had a feeling of uneasiness the moment she saw him, which was verified when she received a paper summoning her husband to appear before the Braun County Court to answer a suit filed by Mrs. Jane Teufelstochter for \$3,000. When she gave Charles the paper he looked worried.

"Of course she cannot get anything out of us but I have precious little time to be running up here to defend myself against every evilly disposed neighbor!"

"It seems strange that she sued you," said Constance. "Of course, you are more than welcome to the first lawsuit in the family, but the property being in my name, I should think she ought to sue me. But law is so funny."

Charles clapped his hands. "Constance you are a veritable Portia. Don't say a word; let her

go on with her lawsuit, and when it comes to trial, if I mistake not, my lawyer will say that I do not own a foot of land in Braun county, and the case will be thrown out."

Being unusually fatigued that evening, Charles went to bed early, sighing as he settled himself on his pillow: "I do know I am contented! Oh, the bliss of the sweet, quiet country!"

In truth, everything breathed peace. Beyond the occasional call of the whip-poor-will in the old chestnut tree, the silence was unbroken. The honey-locust and the wild grapes were in bloom, and as the light wind swayed the vines it sent waves of perfume through the open windows. Charles fell asleep the moment his head touched the pillow, but about midnight he was awakened by a violent pounding on the door. To his inquiry from the window a voice said:

- "It's Mr. Burrows, a reporter for the *Hurrah*, come to hear your side of the damage suit."
- "Come all the way from town at this hour to hear about that little affair? There is nothing to tell."
 - "Mr. Poppy doesn't seem to think so."
- "Mr. Poppy! What on earth is he talking about?" asked Constance, but her husband was not listening to her.
 - "What about Mr. Poppy?" he asked.
 - "He's round at our office now, giving his side

for publication. To be impartial, I have come out to interview you."

"What are you talking about?" asked Charles.

"Is it possible you don't know that he has sued you for fifty thousand dollars?"

"I hear it now for the first time. What is his claim?"

"That you and your partner slandered him—put up a blackmailing scheme and discharged him from his position in Alexander and Company; he tells how you threatened and bulldozed him and hints at other sensational developments to be brought out later."

Constance groaned and hid her face in her pillow.

"Well, have you anything to say?" asked Mr. Burrows, as Charles was silent.

"I am sorry you have had your long ride out here for nothing. At present I can make no statement; I must first consult my lawyers."

"Say, why don't you put in a telephone?" asked the reporter.

"Because I bought this place as a rest from business worries," answered Charles, and Mr. Burrows rode off without further words.

As Charles drew in his head from the window, he was met by reproaches from Constance.

"You don't seem one bit surprised. Have you been expecting two lawsuits, and never told me?"

"Forgive me, dearest; you took the country life

so hard that I hated to add to your worries, but if you insist you shall hear every word that I know myself."

"I do insist. I never trusted that Poppy man,

but I thought you trusted him implicitly."

"It has been many a day since I trusted Fred Poppy. But as it is a long story, and as I see you won't sleep until you have heard every word of it, let's put on something warm — the night is chilly — and go over to the cliff where our voices won't disturb Diana, and you shall have the facts from the beginning."

Then in a hammock under the stars, with the mists of the valley like a lake at her feet, Constance heard a tale of talent perverted.

Charles had discovered first that Poppy was an inveterate liar, next that he had been defrauding the company of certain sums, so he had taken him quietly aside and told him that he must resign his position and — being requested to do so by Poppy — had frankly told the reason.

Constance was deeply concerned. "The American Blade and Trigger Company is lots too smart for you, Charles."

"I admit the fact but fail to see the connection."

"Don't you think they knew Poppy was a good for nothing scalawag and sent him to bother you?"

"Constance, you are very quick. I wonder if they did get him the place? Poppy has certainly played into their hands right along. But do you suppose the Trust would go as deep as that?"

"I believe it capable of anything. You said Poppy was in that foreman business and you have suspected him of purposely employing incompetent workman. I myself believe that Poppy has a past behind him in his northern home, and the Trigger Company, finding it out, when you advertised for a superintendent, sent you a rogue."

"Now that I think of it there are several things that seem to lend color to your suspicions, I shall institute rigid inquiries to-morrow — I ought not to have taken him with so little question though you remember I asked several responsible parties and heard nothing but praise. Oh! I have been having a time!"

"I know it, but why didn't you tell me? Promise me, Charles, that from now on you will let me share all trouble — business or otherwise. You are so honest that you are easily fooled."

"And you, not being honest, I suppose, can scent the rogues at a sniff?"

"My remark had that sound, had it not?" said Constance, laughing. "What I meant was, 'Set a thief to catch a thief' and a woman to catch both. How I wish you were out of it all—the Trust, the lawsuits! Don't you ever feel like withdrawing from the strife and letting the whole business go on without you?"

"If I did, I couldn't, so there's no use wishing. Sometimes I feel discouraged when everything goes wrong and I am tired, then I think of you and that ends it. I can brave anything on top of the green earth, bear any trouble or pain that life can bring, for the sake of you and any children —"

"Oh! Hush!" cried Constance. "I am so unworthy such love!"

Constance's suggestion about the Trust bore immediate fruit. Charles made strict inquiries, and found that after ridding himself of Poppy he had still in his employ two foremen and the head engineer who had worked for the American Blade and Trigger Company.

But although new men were chosen with the greatest care, things did not improve. The head foreman, Eliot, welded to the shops from their first owner's day, was staunch and vigilant—Charles felt that he could depend on him—but in spite of the man's experience and probity, the firm encountered one obstacle after another; not the ordinary run of hindrances, but things that struck at their very reputation. The books showed orders upon orders, but ill-luck dogged the best and most profitable.

For weeks the shops had been run day and night over a contract from the very home of steel, Sheffield, imperative as to time-limit, but top-notch as to price. Old Eliot watched with hawk's eyes, and chuckled over the results. The partners saw with satisfaction the order packed and shipped three days ahead of time. The trip across the ocean was safe and rapid, but two days after the cargo was received, there came a cablegram notifying the firm that the whole shipment had been returned as worthless. Charles and George knew not what to think. Eliot raged, cried fraud, and generally scored foreign firms: he could not test every one of thousands of blades, but he had personally started each day's work, and in proof he produced samples that met every test.

In course of time the cargo came back. One of the new foremen brought specimens up to the office. Charles tried a razor against a common lead pencil.

"Look, George," said he. The edge showed a notch.

"Glass," said George. Charles nodded.

The new foreman beat his hands together. "Did we ship a carload of that!" he muttered. "Old Eliot must be color-blind; he can't tell brown from yellow! The tempering was done under his own eyes!"

Not to be behind the blades, the triggers must go wrong — discovered before shipping by George himself. It was only a screw hole an infinitesimal shade too large, but it meant a misfit and the loss of one of the best contracts ever obtained.

Charles was not pleased with the business out-

look. Prices were getting lower all the time, and profits shrinking. He could no longer be oblivious to the fact that he was engaged in a struggle, not for supremacy, but for life. He saw, too late, how foolish he had been to dream he could ever hold his own against such power. If the proposition had been made now to go in with the Trust on the ground floor, he might have given a different He saw that the most he could hope for was that, to get a clear field, the Trust would offer to buy him outright. They would have to offer; he could not propose it, as it would only show his hand. He made but one stand. If they asked his price, he would not sacrifice; sooner fight to the end. All his native combativeness was roused. they did not offer to buy, if he were forced to go under, it must be at the greatest cost to the American Blade and Trigger Company. He could hold out for some time, as he had some outside assets and Constance had her own income.

The days grew shorter; winter was at hand. Charles knew that he ought to be in town, as he was obliged to leave the shops too early in the afternoon, or else ride by night and make Constance anxious. Reluctantly they made plans for moving. Diana Frewe went on a visit to her brother in Newport.

Her first letter contained a piece of news: her brother's new home was near the Vendire countryplace, and Mr. Vendire — "our Mr. Vendire" — was building a new house that was simply palatial.

The Alexanders had taken a modest little suite at the Dinsmore, and Constance fixed up things and made it somewhat homelike; but the hotel seemed strangely shut in, after the free air of Hill-side. Constance even missed the Teufelstochter cows, and doubted not they were having the time of their lives in her pastures. The first evening, when Charles came home, he and Constance went down to the glaring dining-room.

When they had taken their seats, Charles saw. Constance give a start and blush crimson, and, following her glance, saw Arthur Cabell. Amused at the chance that had brought the three together, he said: "I wonder if he lives here. Not that it makes the slightest difference where Arthur Cabell lives."

"It does to me," said Constance, "and I hope he doesn't live here; I don't like to meet him — I never wish to meet him again as long as I live."

Charles looked into her eyes as if he were worshiping a saint. Was ever woman of her age so guileless! "I thought you had forgotten all about him long ago; is he worth bothering over? Naturally you don't care for his society, but — don't misunderstand me, love — you are so transparent that I would not seem to avoid him; it might appear to one so coarse-grained as if you still had some feeling."

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"How you trust me!" said she. "Don't you think you ought to behave as other men, and not give me quite so much freedom?"

"A man is a fool not to trust his wife. She is either true or she isn't, and no amount of guarding is going to change her heart. Any woman who required watching should not be my wife for long."

CHAPTER W

OTHER CALAMITIES

THOUGH the Poppy case was set for the first week in December, Charles's attorneys were still in doubt what answer to file. They promised to hasten matters as far as safe but they could give no hope of either a speedy or a short trial. This was unfortunate as Alexander and Company had occupation enough in business without wasting time on expensive lawsuits.

At the date fixed for the trial both sides announced ready and the case dragged for seven long days. Constance waited at home in wearing suspense. Was not her husband accused of blackmailing and, while all of his friends believed in him, would not the world at large accept the jury's verdict?

Poppy's side came first and Poppy himself was the first to testify. As might have been expected, his evidence was an ingenious tissue of lies and truth. Following him came a string of witnesses: lazy idlers who had been discharged from Alexander and Company for incompetency, workingmen too busy to notice his lapses, or charitablyjudging church people who had only seen Poppy at his best — all swearing he was a model of industry and rectitude.

Charles's turn came and he was on the stand two days. In a straightforward, truthful manner he told as much of his story as Spleen and Smart would permit and he made a good impression on the jury. Several things prejudicial to his case he admitted with absolute frankness. At the end of the first day, Mr. Randolph sent a little note to Constance:

"Your husband is reflecting honor upon himself and his lawyers; he fearlessly tells the truth like the gentleman he is."

"Of course he does!" cried Constance indignantly.

George Trezevant next testified, giving the grounds which had justified himself and Charles in making their disclosure to Poppy alone, emphasizing the fact that they had maintained absolute silence elsewhere, Poppy himself being the one who had published the facts discovered about him.

As a matter of policy the lawyers for the defense had determined to make no attack upon Poppy's previous record. The disclosure made privately to the plaintiff was a privileged communication. This line of defense permitted the plaintiff to prove his spotless reputation but Charles' counsel would have lost their chance to win the case if they had exercised their right to

prove the opposite. Their policy was to offer no statement not intended to show their absolute lack of malice in all their interviews with Poppy. They must make no animadversions on his character. The defendant had his private opinion supported by facts but in his action he had had no desire for publicity but for the good of the firm had privately and quietly done his duty.

Some member of the Trust was present from the beginning of the trial to the end — generally Mr. Claws or Mr. Wheelock — Mr. Vendire being out of town. After Charles's evidence, Mr. Claws also sent a little note to Constance:

"We are watching in anxious hope that your husband will win."

"Yes, he is!" said Constance, giving the paper to Tat, the terrier, to chew.

After the evidence came the speeches — "brilliant efforts," of course. When Spleen and Smart had said everything they could think of to prove the defendant a monster, and the plaintiff a lamb, the case was given to the twelve men.

It was thought a verdict might be reached by noon, and Charles promised to come straight to the Dinsmore; but the long afternoon dragged and there was no decision. Charles could imagine the restless excitement in which Constance was pacing the floor, and it added to his anxiety as he sat waiting in the courtroom.

At the hotel Constance was so worn out by sus-

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pense that she was really ill. She tried to control herself, and lay down, determined to be quiet until she heard Charles at the door.

Six o'clock! And they had told her noon! Seven — half-past! Of course, there is nothing, or he would be here.

Eight — a step in the hall.

In an instant Constance was in her husband's arms.

"Dearest, be prepared," said he.

"The verdict! The verdict!"

"We find for the defendant," said Charles, and "—almost smothering her with kisses—
we also find the defendant a damn fool."

Charles contended that for days Constance really believed that such were the exact words of the jury. Certain it was that for some time she never spoke of the case without referring to that "horrible verdict."

Following the big damage suit, came the Teufelstochter case, small in comparison but annoying and expensive. As Charles had foreseen, when it came to trial, the suit was thrown out.

After this Constance knew some happy days; then came events shadowing the happiness, but leaving in its place the more precious lessons of grief.

One morning she promised to meet Charles at twelve o'clock and go with him to Hillside, it being a half-holiday and the works closed down for the afternoon. On her way to the office, she heard an alarm of fire, saw a crowd running, heard the words, "Alexander and Company," and ran with the rest.

The office building, five stories high, faced the street, the shops being in the rear. As Constance turned the corner opposite the building, she saw dense smoke pouring from all the windows, but no flames. Thronging people jostled her, but she pushed her way in spite of them as near as the police would permit, and found herself on the street, directly opposite the main entrance. heard rumors: the shops had fallen, two men had been killed, the office building was on fire from top to bottom. She stopped a workman whose face seemed familiar, and gasped her husband's name. He said that Mr. Alexander was unharmed, was somewhere around — he had seen him but a moment before in the street, warning the men about the great safe on the second floor, which, if the floor burned through, might fall and crush them.

Constance had a short-lived feeling of relief. Then, at a window in the fourth story of the office building, between gusts of yellow smoke, she saw two figures; one a girl's, the other — yes, it was Charles! He was being slowly suffocated, and she must stand helplessly looking on!

She extended her arms impotently and cried to him, but her voice was drowned in the hubbub of excited tongues. How she kept her senses she never knew, but she stood looking upward, while the picture burned her brain. Charles seemed to be reassuring his companion; he made her lean out as far as possible, while he fanned the smoke away with his hat. The girl fell back into the room. He lifted her, laid her limp body across the window sill, then climbed out and stood precariously on the rounded cornice of the window below, pulling the girl out so that her arms rested over his shoulders. She seemed quite unconscious, and a man near Constance with a trumpet voice called, "Jump and save yourself!" and some people went under the window, holding a blanket. Constance hazily wondered how he was going to get the girl in his arms to jump with her. She knew just as well as if he had told her, that he was considering jumping with the girl in his arms; that he would never leave her to her fate. She saw him turn his head, as if thinking. Then, at the corner, she saw people waving, heard cheers and a clanging of bells. Four galloping horses, with a wagon and red ladders, swung in sight. Men shouted encouragement, she shouted with them. Charles did not hear. He was making ready for the jump; he had one arm round the girl's waist and was about to pull her from the window. Constance called, "Hold on! Don't jump!" and the man with the trumpet voice took up the cry, which was echoed by a hundred other voices until it must have reached the precious life in jeopardy. The wagon drew up in front. Before it stopped, the men had ladders off and in place. A fireman ran up; Charles passed the limp form to him, then followed him carefully down the long ladder to the street.

Two perfectly strange women were weeping and hiding their faces on Constance's shoulder, but Constance herself was dry-eyed. She made an effort to cross over, but was held back, and some one said, "Hadn't you better come with me, Mrs. Alexander?" She recognized one of the clerks, and allowed herself to be carried home.

When the fire was out, Charles came to tell her, not knowing that she had seen. Aunt Sarah met him and took him in. Constance did not know him. Then she was ill—so ill. Charles let everything go, and sat in dumb misery by her side. He knew then what fear was. Diana came as soon as she heard, sharing the terrors and the vigils, and Diana, with all her unrealities, was a born nurse. She never gave up. Even when the trained nurses themselves thought the end was near, Diana hoped, and braced, and urged.

Youth and strength took a stand by Diana, and the three conquered. Constance came back to life and memory; and not the least hard trial to her nurses was the sight of her after she realized all that had happened, and lay motionless and speechless for days, wondering if she had ever cared for anything or anybody on earth. With returning

strength came the desire to live, and on the day when she took six steps alone from the bed to her husband's arms, she was almost as proud of the achievement as were her nurses.

Diana returned to her brother, and Charles, remembering there were other things on earth, forced himself back to business and the results of the fire. It was a most unaccountable conflagration. One of the foremen said he had noticed a man named Mackey, a driver who had left the company some months before, talking to one of the packers near the point where the flames had first been discovered, but later both men had helped industriously to put out the fire. The shops were seriously damaged; the books of the company were saved, and the office building was only damaged by smoke.

A few days after Constance's recovery, Horace Vendire telegraphed Charles that if he would make it convenient to visit New York in the next ten days, he might find it to his advantage to meet the American Blade and Trigger Company.

Charles was strongly tempted to go, but, after thinking it over, remembered certain events and decided in the negative. He wrote to Mr. Vendire that he was too busy settling the insurance, but if they themselves had any offer to make, he would give it every consideration.

The Trust did not make any offer, but Horace Vendire had business in Lewiston—so he explained when he met Charles quite by accidentand suggested that, as Alexander and Company seemed to prefer selling out instead of rebuilding, they might make an offer.

A date was named, and after careful calculations, Charles and George went to meet the Trust magnates.

Charles named his figures. He was heard without any surprise. These men were handling millions; a few hundred thousand looked small to them.

"Does this include the machinery?" asked Horace Vendire.

Charles controlled his features with an effort. He had not included the machinery, because he knew the worth of machinery which has been through flame. Some of his was fifty years behind time, without the fire, but the instinct of trade made him answer promptly:

"No, it does not include the machinery." And George Trezevant laughed outright.

Horace Vendire instantly said that not for a moment would they consider such figures. Fifty thousand all told was the highest. Would Mr. Alexander consider it?

Mr. Alexander could not and would not. The meeting was at an end.

George, always fair-minded, said he knew that his laugh had nipped negotiations, but a vision of a certain one-sided inventory rose before him, and the contrast made him laugh.



CHAPTER VI

SUSPICIONS

THE new works were to be all that latter-day architecture could make them, with treble their former capacity and when complete, a more formidable foe to the Trust than ever. The machinery was ordered before a brick of the building had been laid, but when the time came for setting it in place, the firm that had taken the contract made one excuse after another, until Charles, growing not only disgusted, but suspicious, claimed the contracts forfeited and approached another firm. This had more work on hand than it could attend to, and was forced to decline - most politely. Still another was not then making the class of machinery wanted, and so it went; not one firm could be found to take the contract. Evidently one and all were under the control of the great Trust.

Charles was desperate, for the building without machinery was the body without vital organs. Then, one day, he announced to Constance that, needing a vacation, he thought he would visit the Deetown Exposition. Constance was too glad to have him take a breathing spell to show her surprise. She saw him go, but in three days wel-

comed him back again, looking fagged to death but happy. He had his machinery.

A firm from Sheffield, England, had exhibited on a large scale, bringing its machines into the country free of duty, as permitted by a special rule. The men in charge of the display had received instructions to sell out, if possible, at the close of the Exposition. Charles bought all the machines they had, at half values, and ordered duplicates and extras, paying cash in advance to clinch the contracts.

"I think you are the smartest man I ever knew," said Constance.

Charles secretly thought he was pretty smart himself, but he merely said: "The next question is, where am I to get the money to make my first payment on the building and start up the works? I took a big slice of the insurance money to pay cash for the machinery."

Constance said she knew, but Charles shook his head.

"You risk nothing," she insisted. "It isn't the principal — only the interest. The banks will take my collateral, and as soon as the shops are running, money will come in instead of going out, and you can pay it back."

But no, Charles said that he and George between them would manage to borrow it elsewhere.

When the new works were ready, it was found that several of their best men, who had promised to return, preferred to work for the American Blade and Trigger Company. Then Eliot himself, their very oldest foreman, one of the few left from the old days, a capable and thoroughly efficient man, suddenly grew trifling and unreliable. For one reason or another, he postponed starting the machinery, until Charles had to discharge him, and being unable to fill his place, took it himself.

The new shops were up-to-date in every particular, and were organized and systematic to the notch. Business began to pour in. Charles's enthusiasm revived, and he entered into affairs with all his old time energy. George also saw light ahead. They would, they must make a success.

But one day Charles and George were standing in the main shop, when without warning a heavy iron bolt fell from the ceiling, missing Charles's head only by a bare inch.

Charles stooped and picked it up. The end of the bolt had been twisted so as to break it off; the marks of the tool were fresh upon it.

There was no room for doubt. Charles handed the bolt to George, and above the buzz of the machinery shouted in his ear:

"With the best wishes of the American Blade and Trigger Company. Shall I return it with regrets?"

But speaking of it at dinner that night, he said, "Yet it proves nothing. Although it is the only occurrence that I can truthfully say could not pos-

sibly have been an accident, it might have been the spite of a single enemy. Of course, when one is on the lookout, every mishap seems planned by the Trust. I believe if a man had proof that a trust were trying to ruin him by such means, he would be justified in making the leaders pay for it with their lives."

"Now isn't that a pretty speech?" demanded Constance. "Suppose something were to happen to one of the directors of the American Blade and Trigger Company. Here are two of us, and maybe a waiter or a stranger or so, to swear that you said you would be justified in killing him."

"People who kill do not generally announce their intentions so openly beforehand, or choose such a public place as a hotel dining-room for the announcement," said George.

Here a waiter brought a message: "A lady would like to see Mrs. Alexander for a few minutes upstairs."

- "How curious that she sent no name!" said Constance, leaving the two men. As she opened the door of her sitting-room, arms were thrown around her, and with a glad cry, she felt herself embraced by Diana Frewe.
 - "Where did you come from?"
- "From New York; my brother had to come on business, and I couldn't resist. I wanted to see you especially and to surprise you and —"

Constance looked at her critically. "What is

it? Something has happened. You are not your usual composed self."

"You are right; something has happened. How can I ever tell you!"

"You are engaged to marry that man!" wailed Constance.

"Yes," returned Diana, as if reciting a lesson, "I have promised to marry Horace Vendire—sometime or other. Why—why don't you congratulate me?"

But Constance laid her head on Diana's shoulder, weeping as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER VII

A MEMORABLE INTERVIEW

AT the first hint of spring, Constance packed her trunks and moved joyfully to Hillside. Charles was glad to get her to the country away from repetitive friends, for every day brought rumors about either him or the firm—many traceable to Poppy—and while Charles did not give them a thought, Constance was prone to worry.

The summer passed rapidly—in battle, the Trust again pressing them to cover. The price cutting in the central territory was fierce. It meant work, day and night, with no profits for the independent firm. The Trust knew where to cut and where to raise, so that for them it was not all loss. Charles and George planned an invasion, but it took time and money, the latter being as ever, the chief lack.

Diana came to spend a month or more at Hillside. After she had been there two weeks, she made a most surprising request. Horace Vendire was coming to Lewiston the middle of August; of course, Constance expected him to call on his fiancée whenever he chose, but she could scarcely credit her senses when Diana asked to be allowed to invite him to pay a visit of some days.

Constance could hardly wait to see her husband alone before telling him. He was unfeignedly pleased. "It will be a good thing for us in many ways. Individually I would never have invited him, as it would argue a friendliness I am far from feeling. But with him as our guest, eating at our table, sleeping under our roof, we shall have opportunities for bringing about a better understanding; it may lead to some sort of trade or settlement, who knows?"

"What was their last offer?"

"A third of our price in cash, and the rest in Trust stock which, so far, has never paid a dividend."

"I suppose you are right in declining it?"

"I know I am, but, I have no choice. Our salvation lies in either selling outright at my price, or holding out long enough to force a truce, when we can divide territory and agree upon a scale of prices which will be really binding to both sides."

"But can you hold out?"

Charles grew silent in revery. He recalled each step of the fight — his ignorance, his high, foolish hopes, then the gradual realization of the truth, of the power of the enemy he had defied, and last of all the desperation of sauve qui peut. The Trust had begun with a wide offer — what had possessed him to refuse? — Then it had narrowed,

never yielding any ground, but offering less and less, coming closer and closer. He had been warned it would be so, but had laughed in disbelief. Now the offering was so small that he did not see how he could possibly consider it.

Vendire accepted the invitation, and his visit commenced auspiciously. He and Charles rode their wheels out the smooth turnpike together, and were met at the foot of the hill by Constance and Diana in the phaeton. Constance's greeting was an amusing struggle between hospitality and dislike; Vendire's the perfection of easy politeness. Diana looked pensively shy.

After dinner some one proposed a walk. Charles and Constance politely accompanied the pair for a short distance, then lagged. Charles had to laugh at his wife's expression, as the engaged couple disappeared around a sharp turn in the path.

Diana, followed by Horace Vendire, idly striking the bushes with his cane, led the way down the steep path below the cliff. He commented, much impressed, on the peculiar topography of this section of country. Hillside was a double hill; not two peaks, but a smaller slope resting on top of the larger like an old fashioned wedding cake, showing two natural, giant terraces, varying from fifty to seventy-five feet in height. On one side wound the public road; on the other

THE DRAGNET

lay a ravine where the original forest growth held unbridled sway.

In this deep ravine, paths made by animals, faultless as to engineering, showing the superiority of instinct to science, formed the only way of piercing the undergrowth. Once below, it was difficult to imagine that civilization lay but a few miles away.

The evening was ideal, a crescent moon in a cloudless sky following a crimson sun just disappearing. The man and the woman strolled through light and shade to the second terrace bordering the ravine. Here Horace Vendire proposed resting upon a flat rock. The town lay far off, showing increasing light, as star after star — electric stars — twinkled beyond the black ravine at their feet. Behind them rose the cliff, boldly black, like a hardy fortress against the pink radiance of the sunset.

Vendire drew Diana to him. For an instant she suffered his caress, then, pushing him aside, said:

- "Now tell me about to-day; did you trade?"
- "Not quite; we shall make it to-morrow, I think."
 - "You are sure it is the best way?"
- "Perfectly sure. I cannot do any better for him. If it hadn't been for me, he would have broken into a thousand bits long ago. The others were for rushing things to an end, but I hate

rushing, and I do not like to crush; the rushing and crushing are the most obnoxious things to me about these combinations."

- "You have been so good," said she, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Sometimes I doubt whether I am right in letting you be so good, for surely long-suffering patience has a limit, and you have borne the loss of time and money patiently. Did I understand you to say this fight has cost your company ever so much more than it has the Alexanders'?"
- "A hundred dollars to their one," answered Vendire, truthfully; "and, on top of the losses, capital lying idle in a great house which I cannot afford to finish for my bride."
- "Do not mind that; a much smaller one will content her."
- "When?" asked he, putting his hand under her chin and turning her face up to his own.
- "When I see my precious Constance free from anxiety, and know it is through you."
- "I have no business bartering with you my heart is too tender but you shall have your wish."

Horace Vendire was earnestly in love. He was willing to go to lengths, indeed; but in his own way, as the instinct of trade was strong. He must know just how many thousands he could bate on the price. He had been so often baffled. Alexander and Company must be got out of the

way, even if he had to part with cherished thousands.

The pair sat in the moonlight — two blonde heads, silvered as if old in youth.

"Can't it be next week?" he gently asked. "Everything will be settled by then."

She hesitated a little, but said, "Why not next week?" Then she leaned against his shoulder in content.

He laid his cheek against her's, and began speaking in that sonorously distinct and musical voice that had so charmed Diana, and many others.

"Have I ever told you, love, that I made a will about a month ago, and that in it I have made provision for you? I couldn't leave you my Trust stock, although it will be very valuable shortly, because — well you wouldn't understand the claims the other directors have, and then your friendship for the Alexanders might lead you to put, unknowingly, dangerous power in their hands; so I have disposed of it otherwise, and have left you the income from some real estate. Certain properties are set aside for an annuity to my mother, if by unlikely chance she should survive me, and my life insurance is to go to my brother one's own flesh and blood, you know - though, to tell the truth, I have already helped him more than I ought through several tight places, and am on the point of doing so again."

"But why have you done all this?" asked Diana. "Surely there is time enough!"

"True, but I am prompt by nature, and a man on the point of marrying thinks of ordering such things."

"But there is no use. I don't like it. To please me, Horace, you will alter this will to-morrow. In the first place—" she broke off with a laugh. "How seriously I am taking things!" she exclaimed. "But really, love, if you must make a will now, you oughtn't to mention me at all. There will be ample time for that; something might happen to prevent our marriage."

"I hope not," he said, with sincerity. "But in that case I could alter the will. But why sup-

pose such an event?"

"Horace, you are the only person to whom I can truthfully say such a thing, but I have always been frank with you. From the very first, when you in your own curiously fascinating way drew from me the promise to write you even the minutest details of my daily life, but swore me to secrecy, I have freely expressed all my doubts and cavils. Somehow, you forced me to do your way. Now that we are engaged, I haven't a thought that is not yours. I have boldly made the wedding day subject to conditions—it is the only stand I have ever taken against you—and you have been good. You are not deceiving me, are you?

I believe I truly love you, yet sometimes when I am away from you I distrust, I fear you are deceiving me. Why is this?"

The simplicity of the question charmed Vendire. "In the first place, you are the most delightfully unpractical of women, and the most unreal. You neither think nor feel after the manner of any other woman on earth. In the second place, your nature is essentially pessimistic and you revel in gloomy forebodings; as witness the tuberose presentiment, and a string of its kindred. Now I myself am an optimist; I never give up. When I am with you, my optimism buoys you. After next week I shall never leave you if I can help it, and your feeling of distrust will die past revival. No, I am not deceiving you. I am true. I love you."

He looked gallant and handsome as he sat beside her in the half-light. The night, the hour, were bewitching. She was supremely happy.

Then she heard a rustling sound in the bushes, and sprang away from him in terror.

"Snakes!" she cried. "There is nothing on earth I am more afraid of; let's go back!"

Horace rose reluctantly. Together they left the wild spot, with its beauty and it snakes — real snakes, and two of them; for Fred Poppy and Jane Teufelstochter, having been bribed to spy, had spied on the briber.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOVERY

WHEN Charles came out with his guest the next afternoon, Constance met him at the gate, so he dismounted to walk beside her, while Mr. Vendire rode on to the house.

"I have a piece of news," said she. "The day is set; Diana is going to be married next week out here — a small affair, only relatives on both sides and ourselves, and a charming little wedding breakfast. Dear, can't I have Aunt Sarah's help again, just for this once?"

Charles looked grave. "Dearest, you know how it hurts me to deny you anything, but I am afraid to promise for the wedding. If this trade doesn't go through now, we shall be at our rope's end, and you wouldn't wish to be entertaining while the firm is making an assignment, I am sure. Of course, you have your money to spend as you choose, so it isn't the expense, nor is it Aunt Sarah. As I have spared you worrying details, you do not realize the situation, for, with all my bold front, we are in close quarters. My last dollar went into the fight to-day. Your income and this place are about all that remain. To

alized then how attached she was to spot. "It will be a far greater hardsl up than I ever imagined," was all she s

"I know," said he, "and I hate the bottom of my heart. I believe I to it, for I hardly believe I could have anxiety and strain of the past two year had this haven in which to recuperate.

"In the present ticklish state of the tions, I wouldn't say anything to Diana mean sure ruin to let the Trust know we are to the brink, and she might ina give that impression to Vendire. whether she tells him everything?"

"She doesn't know any of your busine but she seems to tell him everything she l

"And she is foolishly happy; what you? Girls are funny. Do you wondo nounce you as variable as the shade?"

"But we are not! Our actions co sound reason, worked out so quickly the

ing nature, and find a sort of psychological unity."

"That is the truest thing that man ever said. But I didn't come to meet you, to talk about women. I wanted to hear what happened to-day, and the walls are too thin to talk indoors. Any developments?"

"None of consequence. We fooled away the whole afternoon, skirmishing. I am more than ever sure if it were not for Vendire, we could trade. He is the only one with whom I seem unable to cope. I think he really wishes to trade this time, but he is so afraid he will have to pay a few thousand more than he can force us to accept, that he hangs off. He'll do us up yet, I fear."

"He is unscrupulous. He succeeds by means you would scorn to employ."

"Sometimes it seems as if I would do anything to save the old firm; then, the feeling against Vendire is terrible. If he does ruin us — for it will be his doing — I'll — I'll —"

"You will do nothing but bear it bravely," interposed Constance, in haste. "Thousands suffer misfortune and remain unspotted. We are young; we could start over again and succeed. I would rather," she went on, dramatically "be a tramp in the Wayfarer's Rest this minute, sawing wood for a night's lodging, than Horace Vendire with his millions and his crimes!"

Charles laughed. "You have never been without a night's lodging, and I would hate to have to

dear wife, Vendire can take much away and yet be poorer than I shall ever be."

"I don't agree with you. He has no money, but is going to get a perfectly lo Hush! Here they come now, so look were as happy and care-free as the birair."

The next morning the two men took start. Vendire had gone ahead, but Ch turned to say to Constance that if he was back before dark, she need not expect I they traded, they would have to consult la evening, in which case they would both night in town. Cautioning her about lock and bidding a second farewell, he hast overtake his guest.

"Good-bye and good luck," she called may the day end the suspense, one way or a

Charles stayed closely in his office, exp summons. He knew the directors of th were holding their annual meeting, and sure he was und Company, the directors would like to have a talk with him.

When he arrived, all the directors had gone out to dinner except Horace Vendire, who proposed they should do likewise. Afterwards, Charles tried to recall exactly the conversation between them during the dinner hour, but could only remember impressions, not words. Vendire had tried to betray him into an admission of the standing of Alexander and Company—that he could swear. That he did not succeed was proved by subsequent events. Nevertheless, when they came back to the office, Charles felt as if he had been through a fencing bout.

The others were waiting; negotiations began and dragged. The Trust, without making any definite offer, was feeling its way to a trade, while Charles seemed to be holding firmly to his first price. At nine o'clock, Mr. Vendire said he had another engagement, and suggested an adjournment with an early meeting the next morning. As Charles was leaving, he called out:

"Just make my apologies to the ladies, won't you, Mr. Alexander? I have so many other matters on hand to-night that I cannot accompany you,"—taking for granted that, late as it was, Charles would go back to Hillside.

Something — he could never afterwards account for it — made him refrain from telling Vendire that he intended to pass the night in town himself,

thousand dollars in their common value in cash of the new plant wou they would give, and that he must meeting in the morning prepared to ject whatever offer they decided to ma

He sought George, and failed to fir he returned to the Dinsmore and loun smoking and hoping that George woul The weather was hot and sultry. He had not wasted time, but had gone horness and space. Now, as they would pecting him, he hated to disturb his especially as he had nothing pleasing to icate. He was so tired and depressed, and undecided, that he determined he ne ical exercise of some sort, got his whee to Garden Park. The ride in the darkn his brain wonderfully, and, sitting or sward beneath the stars he saw his cour

It was after eleven when he rode the deserted streets back to the hotel

establishment, so he unlocked the door on the street leading to the front staircase.

His office on the second floor opened on to a landing, with a glass door between. Through this glass a bright light streamed. What did it mean? Was it a careless oversight, or was the watchman taking his ease in a place where he had no business? Charles quietly made his way up the rubber-padded stairs, with a wish, in his caution, that he had brought a pistol, as he might find burglars.

The door was ajar, and on nearing he heard a well-known voice say:

"This is my first and last exploit of this sort. If Horace Vendire doesn't find what he wants here, he'll have to come get it himself."

"It's awfully late; do we have to report tonight?"

"We do; he's waiting. But you needn't go there; I'll take him the papers."

Charles stepped cautiously, so as to see through the glass. The great safe was wide open. The books of the company lay upon the bookkeeper's desk, and bending over them, busily copying figures, were Arthur Cabell and Fred Poppy. OUT at Hillside, Constance lay in fulness. To what agreement and the Trust come? The fact of in town over night showed that some phase in the situation had developed anxious, and a crushing sense of sor pending benumbed her reason and three a nervous state at variance with her not of self-control. In vain did she assist that the forebodings were the result rometer, for during the entire day of floated low in the valley and the atmosphere sultry and leaden.

Somewhere past the middle of the fell asleep, but in a little while she aw start. She knew not if she had drean she had heard a noise as if something I against an upstairs window. She lister all was quiet she again dozed.

Another and

Provoked at such nonsense, she again composed herself to sleep. This time it was sleep, profound and peaceful, but at the dark hour preceding daybreak the disturbing cause was real; she was awakened by the crashing of a storm.

She knew it was coming, and she was glad of it. It would bring some relief to the close, hot night, and she loved a storm. This was one indeed! She was wondering whether Diana minded it, when a momentary lull brought the sound of knocking, and she heard a voice calling:

"Constance, Constance — are you awake?"

"Come in. Who could sleep? Isn't this grand? Why child, what on earth has happened?" For as Diana entered, a flash of lightning showed her, pale, trembling, with the sleeve of a white wrapper that she wore over her gown torn and spotted with blood.

Diana's eyes followed her look. "Oh!—my arm?—don't worry. It is nothing."

"How did you hurt it?"

"I don't know — that is — I think it must have been a shutter that flapped — I was trying to fasten it. I hadn't noticed that it bled."

"Can't I bathe it, or something?"

"Don't bother; it is the merest scratch, not a bit painful. At present, all I need is company. Storms do not generally alarm me, but doesn't this one seem unusually severe?"

"It is more than severe; it's gruesome. Come,

Hailstones battered the cottage as i boulders. The evil powers seemed le were rushing in a mad race round corner, with a patter, patter, as of bearing mischievous goblins, flappin banging doors, and whistling eerily up chimney.

It was too violent to last, and in about the lightning ceased, the thunder far-away rumble; and by the time the streaks were tipping the hills, the stars win a sky of sapphire, and a delicious cocome to the heated earth.

But with the early dawn, haggard, wling as if he had encountered a battalion came Charles Alexander; and at the sigmud-stained clothes and his weary fistance uttered a cry of terror such as had been unable to wring from her.

"Charles! You have been exposed it!"

too heavy for riding, I left my wheel, took the Lee street cars to the foot of the hills, and walked the rest of the way."

But, as he spoke, it was evident to his wife that he was controlling intense excitement of some sort.

Diana started to withdraw. "Stay," he commanded hoarsely, "I have something to tell you."

She sank back limply. "I know it. It is about Horace Vendire." Death was no whiter.

"You knew it? You knew what he wanted? You let him send men to my office to steal, and you neither tried to prevent him nor warned me?"

"Hush! Hush!" cried the shocked Constance.

"You are killing her."

"Office — to steal?" questioned Diana. "What can you mean?"

"I mean this—oh, I'll not spare him!—I threatened, and I am going to keep my word. If, after knowing his true character, you are still willing to marry him, your future will be of your own shaping. I have warned him that I would expose him to you as a cold, unscrupulous, blackhearted scoundrel; have told him never to enter my house again, or I would set the dogs on him."

Diana had flung herself face downward across the foot of the bed. "Go on," she moaned, in a smothered voice; "tell me everything that happened."

"Trust me, I will. Horace Vendire sent two

jail birds — Fred Poppy and Constance's old lover, Arthur Cabell — up to my office to-night. He thought I was away, out here. They had the combination and opened the safe. When I saw them, they were copying from the books of the company. To remove the act out of all region of doubt in my mind, I overheard them say that they had to report to Vendire to-night."

"How dreadful! What good would such

knowledge do them?" cried Constance.

"This much, and it means failure: it was of the utmost importance for the Trust to learn how we stand; Vendire tried in every way to find out, and as a last resort, to-morrow being the day appointed for a trade, had recourse to this means. are not going to part with their money now. With the knowledge he obtained to-night knowledge of the straits to which he has brought us, for I doubt not by this time he has figured it out — Horace Vendire can snap his fingers in our faces. Unless I frightened them off before they had all they wanted, he knows he need only wait and we are ruined. If we cannot raise the money to pay notes due in two weeks, the last obstacle to his grasping ambition will be removed. We were on the point of trading; they had indicated what their offer would be: it was small, but that much better than nothing, and I had decided to accept it this very day. Oh, for a few paltry thousands to beat him! To grind him as he has ground us!"

"Did they see you?" asked Constance. "What excuse did they give? I don't see how you managed to keep your hands off them."

"Constance, for one instant, as I saw these miserable tools before my open safe, stealing my company's secrets, I knew that if I had had a pistol I would have shot them dead. I cannot tell you how overwhelming the feeling was. Then it passed and I realized that the event called for all my wits; that, whatever the provocation, I must not kill. With anguish I thought of what your life would have been had I been armed. may come to you through me, but never disgrace. My next thought was that I must treat these fellows like any common burglars - summon the police, surround the building, and have them arrested. As my private burglar alarm is in the office, I had to go to the Dinsmore, the nearest place. I suppose my call was answered as quickly as possible, for by the time I had returned to the shops the patrol wagon was in sight. Police came from several directions, blowing their whistles a stupid way they have. All the exits were guard-Four men went up the office stairs with me to find a closed safe, a bright light, and an empty room. They think they have the laugh on me; that the light was my only ground for alarm.

m your power. You say you wrote a

"Yes I wrote. I don't know wh wise, but I like straight ways, and afraid of a return of the killing mani interview with the head conspirator."

"What did you write?"

"What I thought, I can promise you Vendire plainly what I had seen, and wheard; of my intention to expose him to directors, to Diana; of my determinate verything in my power to prevent his—there, I knew, was his one vulnera for if he loves anything on earth, it is you

Diana gave no sign. Constance bent putting her arms round her and kissing derly:

"Say something, Diana dearest; isn' of Charles to tell you? Better now the wards?"

"Had you any suspicions before to Diana asked tearlessly, "I mean — I kn shrewd and grasping in "

accidents — accidents that helped his company and hindered ours. The fire — you remember one of his men had been seen hanging round the place where it broke out; then there were broken bolts, wrong valves, negligent workmen, and so forth."

The girl sat up. "And last of all, this," she said, in a hopeless, colorless tone. "I see it all. Your story is true. No wonder he urged me to hasten the marriage. I will never marry him!"

Then she went out, her blonde hair flowing in straight silkiness over her trailing wrapper.

"This night decides one thing," Charles said, when he and Constance were alone; "Hillside must be sacrificed."

CHAPTER X

MUTTERINGS

CO Hillside must go into the maw of the Trust! Constance wished to save the firm, but much of her heart had been won by this country home. To think she had ever rebelled against the life! Was it a judgment, that she had only to love a home to be parted from it? Must she leave these lovely slopes, this wild tangle of nature, these rugged cliffs where for sixty miles the eye could roam over valley and hill? She thought of her favorite rambles, where she had gathered ferns and wild flowers: of the nooks where she had sat listening to bird-song and the curious hum of insect life, while good resolutions were born and strengthened. The place had not only been full of blessing to her, but to her harassed and overworked husband it had brought health and strength for the one-sided battle with unscrupulous men.

Must they sell now? Something might happen. Had not they better keep up appearances a little longer? When Horace Vendire discovers they have sold, will he not know it is the end? In

spite of last night's villainy he may not realize the smallness of their outside resources.

"No, that is false reasoning," she said aloud.

"Nothing would give that man greater pleasure than to know we are living beyond our means. To do so is to play into his hands. We will sell the place, the carriages, if necessary, my diamonds; Charles must take all my capital; then Horace Vendire will know we have money, and that we can make him suffer fearful loss for months to come."

How she hated Trusts! What difference nowadays between the men who tortured as they were being tortured, and those of the so-called dark ages who pillaged, burned, took human life without fear, under the same protection — wealth and power?

Constance then went up to the guest room, and viciously tossed everything belonging to Horace Vendire into his empty trunk, snapping the key with a jerk that relieved her greatly. Then, hearing Lawson, the cook, stirring, she summoned her and instructed her to get the gardener's help to carry the trunk downstairs, where it would be ready when the express man called for it.

In a few hours, Charles appeared, rested and hungry. Breakfast was served, and Constance went to call Diana, but found her still abed, looking utterly broken. On her entrance, she turned away her head with a groan. me. No one — do you underst

Constance nodded determinedle mind easy. No one will dare of my house."

Charles decided to keep his ent the meeting, and, wary and quiet, ments. Vendire might have overre the plain letter might bring h Charles went first to his shops, to watchman. The bookkeeper must a either a knave, or too negligent for sponsible position.

The Trust meeting was held in th rival shops, and Charles was prompall the directors were assembled ex They waited a quarter, a half-hour come.

Was Horace Vendire at last afithing?

Mr. Wheelock went to hunt him turned with the info-

if you wish, I will go round to the Dinsmore myself."

The clerk said that Mr. Vendire had left the hotel the night before, and had not returned.

"But he did come back," said Charles, for I sent a note to his room by the bell boy, who said he was in."

"He went out again, after that."

"In the storm?"

"Long before the storm; took his wheel, and hasn't yet come in. I think he is with his brother."

"Brother? What brother?"

"Arrived this morning; found him gone and went to meet him."

All this was duly related to the directors, who thought the brother's arrival accounted for the tardiness. Charles did not express any opinion.

But a new phase was presented: Mr. James Vendire himself came to the office of the American Blade and Trigger ompany, to inquire where he would be likely to find his brother. His business was imperative; he had come from New York on matters of importance, and delay was costly.

Charles rather liked Mr. James Vendire's looks. He noted the kindly lines of the face — trouble lines and struggle lines. He was not a handsome man — James had none of Horace's good looks — but he looked a better man.

"If we had had him to deal with, the story might have been told differently," thought Charles. Then aloud, "Perhaps your brother broke his wheel, and, not knowing the country, lost his way seeking shelter from the storm on foot?"

"Don't you think he may possibly have gone to your house? I understand it holds a special attraction for him at present."

"He has been paying us a visit, but I am sure he did not go out there last night. In fact, the ladies are not expecting him out again."

"I cannot help feeling somewhat uneasy; I wish you would advise me."

"If the watchman on the outside saw nothing of him, and the hotel clerks have told all they know, I fear I can offer no further suggestion."

"Evidently it is not his intention to remain away for any length of time, as all his traps are in his room," said the brother.

"Excepting some things now being sent in from my place." And, thinking of how the man had regarded the laws of hospitality, Charles inwardly raged.

The directors decided that nothing could be done until the president returned, and adjourned the meeting. Charles went back to the shops, to put his own work on George's shoulders, while he took advantage of the delayed meeting to seek a purchaser for Hillside. This was Mr. Clark, a friend who had openly envied him the country home and expressed a desire to own it should Charles ever wish to sell.

Mr. Clark knew the place, so had no need to look at it. He promised to consult his wife and see whether she still desired it. Before evening, Charles had a note offering ten thousand. He rode out home to report. George promised to sleep in the office — his own thoughtful proposition — as Charles must have a night of rest for the clear brain needed for to-morrow's negotiations.

"Guess what, Constance," he called, as she came to meet him, eager for news, "Horace Vendire hasn't showed up at all to-day."

"I am glad he has the grace to keep out of your sight for a time, anyhow."

"It rather surprises me. But he's up to some devilment, you may be sure."

"I wish you were never going to see him again as long as you live!"

"No such luck! He'll be on hand to-morrow, as large as life and twice as natural. Nothing ever happens to rogues of that sort; they land on their feet every time." Then he told of the offer for the place.

"Ten thousand!" cried Constance. "Less than half the cost! My dear, hear me right now: if we ever get rich enough to buy another country-place, and some poor mortal has to part with a beloved home, I intend giving every penny asked, and something for associations."

"Always supposing that they would sell associations," said Charles, teasingly. "Mr. Clark is

intent upon making a good trac

"Then I should like to know comes in, and the good of it? ... not take his old offer. I hope the spot."

" No, I told him I would consi

"Well, you just won't, Character That is, you may, but I won't. and I do not intend to present it

And Constance, who until not bravely, gave one quick sob, and to head.

"Of course dear," said her husb "I am going to make the best tra I can't get a better offer I must to it may save the race."

Constance made no reply and habit stopped at the little summe cliff, where she and her husband view the sunset every evening; bu the red and green and cold

CHAPTER XI

SUSPENSE

A NOTHER day passed without news of Horace Vendire. His papers were examined by his brother for a line, which might explain his non-appearance. Many figures and dates were found, but no message. Charles then decided that he ought to tell, not the brother, but the directors, of his discovery on the night of August 28th, and let them use their own discretion about telling the brother. He wrote for an appointment, asking that Poppy and Cabell might also be summoned.

He stood facing his two enemies and the semicircle of impenetrable faces, and, wasting no time on preamble, began:

"These two gentlemen can probably throw some light on your president's absence. Somewhere about midnight, Tuesday, they brought him a report that he had ordered and for which he was waiting."

Fred Poppy's face twitched, Cabell's grew blood-red.

Mr. Claws smiled easily. "You seem to in-

they had my books, Tuesday calling out figures. I heard the order of your president, somewhere. You must underst them and heard them myself, in at the shops that night to n

Mr. Claws held up a protesting a care, Mr. Alexander; these are that must be substantiated." Ge have you to answer?"

thing was shipshape."

- "Damned lie," said Arthur Cab
- "Make him prove it," said Poppy "Who were your witnesses?' Claws.
- "I tried to get witnesses; I s police, but the birds had flown. Yo unsupported word, because I speak

In gentle sorrow Mr. Claws "Excuse me, Mr. Alexander, but we no such accusations against in this room.

"Object? He wanted to see where we stood," blurted Charles.

"And even granting, for the sake of argument, that he would condescend to use such methods of obtaining information, how could it hurt you?"

Charles avoided the snare. "Are the books of the American Blade and Trigger Company open to the public, Mr. Claws? Would it hurt you if I had private access to them?"

"We are all gentlemen here, Mr. Alexander," rejoined Mr. Claws, screwing his unlighted cigar between his lips, "we have always found you trustworthy; we do not doubt your statement, that you believed you saw what you say you saw, but the imagination plays some curious tricks. We are disposed to be considerate, you have had some serious reverses [allusion inimitable!]; we will overlook much out of sympathy."

Charles was staggered at this audacity. He bit his mustache in thought.

"Is there anything further you would like to consult us about?" asked Mr. Claws.

Charles had one more card to play. "I have not mentioned my discovery to any one but my family — of course, not to the brother; send for him, ask him to let you have any figures and dates found in your president's room; if they agree with my books, my accusation is proven." Charles's intense desire was to learn whether the knowledge

surreptitiously obtained was shared by the directory.

The moral directors lifted pious eyes. "And what excuse for such unwarrantable liberty can we make when our president returns, young man?" asked Mr. Claws. "Gentlemen, if there is nothing further, the meeting stands adjourned."

Charles was beside himself. "I'll not waste any more time on you!" he cried in anger. "You were probably all of you in the plot. But you have got to hear me to-day! I ask a certain price for my plant and the good will. You want to get me out of the way. You pay my price to-day, or every dollar I can rake and scrape goes into this fight. You have my figures; I take no compromise offers. Unless you are prepared to accept this one, it is useless to negotiate further, for I'll fight until I haven't a whole shirt to my back!"

"Many a man has had to do that," smiled Mr. Claws, easily. "Of course, we can do nothing until Mr. Vendire returns, when you can make your proposition in due form and it will be considered. As the meeting has adjourned, it is not necessary to make any record of this offer, Mr. Secretary. I will bid you good morning, Mr. Alexander."

Charles rushed forth into the street alone, angry beyond words, and with the disquieting reflection that passion had got the better of him,

as of all the men, he, only, had lost his self-control.

Yet another day and no tidings. The now really alarmed brother knew no rest. Some accident had surely occurred. He asked the police to investigate. The inquiries began to attract attention. Vendire was reported to carry heavy life insurance, and the agents were notified to look sharp.

The newspapers took a hand. One day they traced him, then they had him, next they were all at sea. There never was a disappearance with less on which to work. Large rewards now interested many people in the hunt. The Vendire family and the Mundane Insurance Company pledged themselves to several thousands.

As far as known, the night clerk at the Dinsmore was the last person who had seen the missing man; he had left his key, had taken his wheel, and had gone out that Tuesday night without mentioning his destination.

The bell boy claiming to have spoken with him added a few details:

About midnight, Tuesday, as nearly as he could remember, No. 5 had been called to room 437. The room was occupied temporarily that night by Mr. Alexander, whom he knew well, as he had formerly lived there. This gentleman had given him a note and a nickel, with instructions to place it (the note, not the nickel) under Mr.

3 ... some papers.

nim the note, been told there was had left.

Mr. James Vendire said that papers mentioned by the boy, he satchel in hopes of finding a clue to absence of his brother. He had papers, mostly figures and initials c significance, but no note.

Mr. Alexander was questioned a tents, and answered that it was mere business matter. He had not the hea his discovery unnecessarily, on accobrother, whom he was growing t mensely.

Mr. James Vendire told Charles Claws had asked him for the papers the the mysterious disappearance, but, as h no satisfactory reason for claiming the James) had refused, and had deposite box in the bank, pending investigatio

When Charles heard this. he is

ference it may make to us if that man has really gone out of our lives."

"Yes, but why has he? There must have been something besides my note; severe as it was, he is too hardened to have cared or feared any unsubstantiated accusation I could have made about that night, especially as only his tools are implicated. He's trying some new trick. I wish I knew what it is."

"Perhaps he is dead."

"I do not feel as if he were. He will bob up serenely — disabled, maybe, but still in the ring. When he does come, we will show him what fighting is, figures or no figures."

In all the surmising, Diana alone said nothing. When she first learned of her lover's mysterious absence, she expressed no surprise, but rather relief, and at hints of calamity she showed no feeling. But she looked like a ghost, and lost flesh daily.

Then came many whispers. The brother was the principal beneficiary. The brother was a stranger; he had come to Lewiston the very night of the disappearance; had arrived before midnight, yet had not sought his brother before morning, although his hotel, the Roxbury, was but a stone's throw from the Dinsmore and though he had admitted to several that he had come on urgent and important business.

Further investigation disclosed nothing. The

, or any moment

ing his approaching marriage ar presence at the ceremony. She w the disappearance, as, being old a delicate, it was deemed best to keel rance as long as possible.

Authentic pictures with accurate of the missing man were given prom in the papers; likewise, of his broth mother, of the dwellings in Newpo York. Horace Vendire, his family, hhis doings, his holdings, were eulogia specified nine days, and longer.

Meanwhile, business was at a standst ander and Company waiting, the Amer and Trigger Company ignoring.

PART II THE LAW AND THE BOY

CHAPTER I

A VILLAIN'S WORK

THESE were sharp days for Alexander and Company. Their situation was so perilous that is was impossible to see ahead even twenty-four hours. The ignoring silence of the Trust, interrupting negotiations, cut them off from present hope of relief by that means; and this fact, together with the notes soon due, made the outlook seem bluer than ever.

Then they had a piece of luck. Mr. Clark bought Hillside and paid twelve thousand for it; and for the live stock, farming implements, and part of the furniture, three thousand more. Furthermore, his family was going abroad, and if the Alexanders chose to occupy and care for the place during the rest of the summer, it would be a real favor.

As ever, on the slightest provocation, Charles became buoyantly hopeful; this fifteen thousand might win the fight.

At first Constance was delighted over the re-

prieve; then it seemed as if it only prolonged the regret and pain of renunciation. When she no longer had the feeling of ownership, pleasures became cares; from the moment that she signed the deed, her interest in the place changed. If the gardener ploughed, he was ploughing for the Clarks; if he pruned, she would never eat fruit from those vines. Formerly, everything born on the place had been an excitement and a delight; now, the little Jersey heifer made her sigh; its beauty was not for them. At the young colt, pronounced as fine as silk, she would not even glance; it meant only a few dollars more at the breaking-up sale. There was a taint on everything.

But in spite of her regrets, or rather because of them, she worked hard to save what she could from her income, which was now their sole means of subsistence. Fortunately it was ample; and for this very reason she knew that, if she could save, Charles would accept the savings where he refused to take the principal. For the first time in her life, she learned the meaning of economy. One could do with so little, when one tried. She discharged all the servants except Lawson, the cook, and she attempted housework. She was thankful Aunt Sarah was off summering somewhere in Massachusetts; she would have died at the sight of a Parker doing housework. She marveled at her own change of feeling, as she

persevered in spite of distaste and fatigue, and in these hard days learned lessons that years of prosperity had failed to teach.

Diana asked to remain. She had to board somewhere, as she did not think it right to live with her married brother all the year round. Would not Constance let her stay awhile? She entreated so earnestly that Constance could not refuse, and the assistance was timely enough. With the evil to the firm temporarily averted, and with the daily bread a certainty, life once more settled down to peaceful routine.

Then, one September morning—a never forgotten 19th— Constance had business in town, and dropped in at the shops to see her husband.

As soon as she entered the office, Charles and George both came towards her, with faces so grave that she instantly asked the cause.

- "He has been found!"
- "Oh, Charles! Dead?"
- "Yes; Mr. James had a telegram from his wife. The body has been recovered in some way—there were few details—his mother has gone crazy. I helped him get off, an hour ago. Claws and Wheelock went along, also Mr. Blount."
 - "Who is Mr. Blount?"
- "Haven't you ever heard of Blount? He is a sort of specialist-lawyer — disappearances; his own father disappeared and has never been found.

specially good at prodding detec

"Tell me precisely what the urged Constance, thinking of Diar.

"Nothing except that the body mysteriously to the Newport hous servants are there. Vendire's moing the winter with Mrs. James in l

"Isn't it dreadful! Poor Diana
"You must tell her immediately;

know how."

So Constance, heavy of heart, we she entered the wide gates, she though fully beautiful everything looked, and setting for her sad news was all th color and odor. Nature was so un She shivered when she saw Diana si alone on the porch, her delicate head the wistaria, and, not answering the over her unlooked for return, drew own room and closed the door.

Of what was said then, Constance afterwards speak

I feared. Come to her, and talk of other things, if you can."

The two went upstairs. Diana, all in white, lay upon a couch by an open window, her eyes closed, and her folded hands so motionless that Constance uttered a cry.

"No, Constance," said Charles, hastily, feeling

the limp wrist; "she has only fainted."

"Are you sure? Yes; her eyelids quiver." Constance regained her faculties. "Some water; help me to lay her flat on the floor. That is better; her lips have some color. Oh, you have the brandy? You are spilling it down her dress and she's not getting a drop; give it to me. Diana, love, take this for Constance. We are here—right by you."

Diana opened her eyes. "Has he come?" she asked.

"Has who come, dear?"

"Horace."

Constance responded promptly: "He cannot come yet; rest a little." And by a sign she sent Charles for a doctor.

The night that followed was full of anxiety. Diana was given a soporific, and slept fitfully, moaning and talking. Constance thought it the beginning of a serious illness; but in the morning Diana was in her right mind and without fever, though she was weak, silent, and in need of the

.... neie nis sister in

Soon he had startling particul marked "Books," sent to the Newport, servants had unwittin body. After a few days, suspicic they had reported to the family and discovery had come.

Mr. James wrote that, though ti there could be no mistake, as the identify—the hair, the teeth, the c letters in the pockets. There had I well as murder, for neither watch I been found, although some studs, sla ring had been spared. There w marks of violence; not a broken be stunning blow on the temple, and th personality had been sent to its last soon as all legal requirements had the funeral would take place from I residence.

Then Mr. James delicately sug might be of assistance in future in Charles would be to use his own judgment in the matter; assuring him that everything should be done to spare her, and that nothing shocking or gruesome would be shown to her.

Diana immediately said that she had expected to be summoned, and would go, only she must have Constance with her. Considering her physical weakness, both of her friends were surprised at her self-control, but in the past two weeks Diana had often surprised them. Thanks to Mr. James, the ordeal was far less trying than any of the three had anticipated. Diana merely had to identify the letters as her own, and add her recognition of trinkets, clothing, and such matters.

Then came the funeral and the interment in the family mausoleum. When Horace Vendire, with such care and expense, was preparing this dwelling, how little he realized in what form its first inmate would come to take possession of one small corner!

The event was memorable. The rare flowers, the long line of private carriages, the crowded church, the presence of celebrities, the elaborate music, and the combined eloquence of some half-dozen ministers, all spoke for the importance of the deceased. Poor common clay is shoveled out of sight and forgotten in an hour, but such as Horace Vendire must be laid to rest with ceremonial imposing enough for a prince.

All of the directors of the American Blade and Trigger Company, dignified and black, were there: Mr. Claws, somewhat fidgety because the time and place deprived him of his unlighted cigar to twist; Mr. Wheelock, in a flowing cravat, tied by his artist daughter; Mr. Thoreau, looking like a well-fed beast ready for the market; Mr. Everton, with a settled air of affluence and gout; Mr. Regnolds, with a white rose in his buttonhole—all outwardly solemn, and inwardly wondering how they would rank in the purchase of the deceased's stock in their company, which their constitution gave them the right to absorb.

Charles and Constance were there, on account of Diana, who insisted it was her duty to attend. Constance was thoughtfully sad, shocked, but not grieved; Horace Vendire had caused her too much suffering for grief. As for Charles, there was no hypocrisy about his demeanor at that funeral. Decently grave he was, but with no pretense of personal loss, gazing with interest on the pageant, impressed by the grouping, the white robes in a chancel of rich lights and flowers, and the crowd of smart people, with its curbstone edge of poverty.

And Diana?

Conventionality demanded certain things of Diana, which she punctiliously conceded. She excluded herself from the public, she wore the proper symbols of grief, but she felt all the time as if she were on the stage. She could not help her sense of the dramatic being roused; she was a personage, a center. To be sure, she shrank—

really shrank — before the ardent curiosity of hundreds of peering eyes, as she trailed into the church, clinging to her brother. She could hear her name whispered, as she passed up the aisle in her black garb and floating veil such as a genuine widow would have worn, but although moved by many emotions, she had no feeling of real widow-hood.

Mr. James probably came nearest to grief. Sorrow he felt, and a desire for retribution to the fullest extent of the law; a feeling of loneliness at being the last of a large family of children—but true mourning?

The mother would have grieved as mothers always grieve but after that first shock of seeing the body, heaven had mercifully clouded her reason and in a private institution she sat smiling vacantly and reiterating:

"My handsome Horace has come back!"

So inexorable is cause and effect. Every life without love as its best aim is wasted; a life without true service for love leaves no true mourner. At this impressive funeral, not a single heart wept for Horace Vendire.

In the shuffling after the service, Mr. Claws separated from the other directors, to wait for Charles at the door.

"Can we see you privately at your hotel?" he whispered, behind his hat. Charles nodded; he could not afford to remember bygones.

said Mr. Claws, as if he were beging speech, "that we are brought face to-day, compelled in common de that we made a grievous error in you had any connection with our predisappearance. His death by violating restoration of his remains, see that you could not have been in

"I!" exclaimed Charles. "The you believed my story!"

Mr. Claws smiled enigmatically. we never disbelieved that you really operated with what you saw, or thou that night; that somebody was in you your safe — whom you mistook for our president, and whose language strued. We presumed you must h distinctly — perhaps merely the bac truders. They may even have been you thought — they were not worth c but, at our instigation?



A VILLAIN'S WORK

111

outsiders — that you — well, that you knew more than you would tell. But murder! No. We exonerate you entirely. Will you shake hands and be friends?"

Charles, ever generous, extended his hand. It was right of them, and rather manly, and best for all that they should be friendly. They could not understand that a man such as he would never descend to certain things, but, as they were born so, he would be tolerant and overlook — for Constance's sake. When the meeting broke up, so smiling were they all that no one would have guessed that the fine fellow in whose arm Mr. Claws paternally linked his own was not a person high in the good graces and favor of the American Blade and Trigger Company.

SOON after their return, the forced to move to town. Chatime he had to spend on the road g and he was unwilling to put unnect work on Trezevant, who not only during the day, but was sleeping within a dingy corner of the shops. As was expensive, they rented a modest rooms, but plenty of sunlight. Cathey could save here, especially a wished to make her home with the

Finally, the last day at Hillside concharles drove Diana and Lawso get things ready there, leaving Constal last load off, and to make sure that e in good shape for the Clarks, who in possession in the spring. Constant every room, list in hand, checking new owners had purchased. Then window bolts.

town, and, getting in, without one look from the window, she left Hillside.

When she arrived at the new home, she was pleased to find that Diana and Lawson had arranged the furniture in the small rooms, and had a dainty little luncheon awaiting. As she was sitting down to enjoy it, her first visitor rang the bell — Aunt Sarah, just returned from the East and the latest fashions, looking younger than ever, and with a torrent of society gossip that was almost Sanscrit to Constance, occupied so long with the realities.

"What was your idea, Constance, in coming to this tiny place?" she asked, when she had given a full account of the delights of her summer.

Constance hesitated, but only for a moment. "Economy," she said, boldly.

Aunt Sarah looked anxious. "My dear child, has your husband been preaching? Don't let him fool you; they all try it. It's a trick. Every now and then they think it their duty to cry hard times, when it is no such thing. You go to scrimping and saving, like an obedient wife, and the first thing you know he buys an automobile or a yacht or wants you to give a ball."

Constance smiled. "But this is real, Aunt Sarah. You know we are fighting a big trust, and while, eventually, we expect to win, we have to be content with little or no profits for a few years."

"Trusts! Profits! What difference do they

Lo circa and unstrun

happily spared a decision by her; off to another track.

"Talking of money reminds m a piece of news to-day," she said voice in deference to Diana's presen walls. "I heard that Horace Ve will shortly after his engagement toher millions."

"Oh, aunt! I wonder if it is dreadful it would be!"

Aunt Sarah put up her jewel "Constance Parker, what on earth with you to-day? You seem to be a thing distorted, looking at the world It's that country business—" she c phatically; "the very moment you fondness for that sort of life, I kn bound to grow careless and indifferen ways, and opinions. People who lov always seem to think they have to si zation."

Constance

THE WILL

changed, and let the rest of the visit pass in banalities.

The next day a little lawyer sprang a sensation by notifying those whom it concerned that he held the Last Will and Testament of Horace Vendire, duly signed, attested, and sealed in his presence, a month before the disappearance.

Charles came to tell the two women.

"No, no!" cried Diana: "It's a mistake! He did not intend it to stand!"

"You surmise the contents of the will?"

"If it was made only a month before he disappeared. Had he lived, he would have altered it. I begged him to. Must I go to the meeting of the heirs?"

"I think it is best. Cheer up; there are many things worse than money. Constance and I will go with you. Mr. James is back, and has asked us."

So Diana went, and she could not have looked more terrified had she been listening to the last trump, instead of to the smooth voice of a young lawyer reading the bequests of her dead lover.

The will was dated, July 26th, 1900. By it, Horace Vendire's life insurance, was left to his brother James, an annuity of five thousand dollars to his mother, and an income of only three thousand a year to his fiancée, Diana Frewe, as long as she remained unmarried. It was evident to Charles that Vendire did not wish to give her

enough to help her friends. The residue, and, eventually, the principal, were to be used in building and endowing the Horace Vendire Public Library in the city of New York.

In a codicil, he directed that his stock in the American Blade and Trigger Company should be sold, the directors of that company being given the option of buying it at par before it was offered elsewhere.

Mr. James Vendire was the first to congratulate Diana.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, shrinking from his proffered hand. "I cannot bear it! It is yours; you must take it!" She grew almost incoherent.

Constance petted and soothed. "Be still, dear. Remember you are weak and unstrung. We will go home now, and see what can be done later."

CHAPTER III

THE CANE EPISODE

THE detectives now had a new starting-point with a fresh impulse, for, in addition to Mrs. Vendire's first reward of one thousand dollars, Mr. Claws had added another, and Mr. James Vendire three, the total making the force rub its eyes.

Beginning with the driver who had delivered the trunk in Newport, the different persons who had handled it were asked to tell their tales. Nothing uncommon was disclosed. The trunk had been expressed at noon on Tuesday, September 11th. 1900 - two weeks after Mr. Vendire had been last seen at the hotel — from the Union Station in Lewiston, where the Universal Express Company had one of its largest offices. The express had been prepaid, and the name of the sender on the books was Mr. Frederick Long, but the appended address was fraudulent. agent, one Craft, remembered or thought he remembered that the trunk had been brought in a wagon driven by a negro, whose name he did not know, though he had a distinct recollection of a rather well-to-do-looking white man attending to Whereupon the wise heads trace of the two packages referred to, an to appear accidentally before the a clared positively that neither of then trunk.

When Mr. Blount, the "I Lawyer," heard this report he sm He ceased to smile, after he had sum to an interview in his little red brich the city hall, and had heard all tha tell concerning the trunk, the wagon the well-to-do gentleman.

Then that wonderful bird that bui belongs to no climate, and never seem mate, carried rumors, dropping them of corn on fallow ground.

Agent Craft was asked by a dete employ of the Mundane Insurance (sit behind Mr. James Vendire at evening at the Roxbury. He compl he came from the dining-room. the "Those fools are going to muss things up so that they will never get at the truth!"

The very next day, Mr. Devin, the Prosecuting Attorney, mentioned a name under his breath which made Mr. Blount purse up his mouth and say:

"A motive, had he? Have you ever seen the

One of Mundane's officers, present, chimed in:
"We have seen the man, and we agree with Mr.

Devin, provided Horace Vendire is really dead."

Mr. Blount smiled indulgently. The man continued:

"Our secretary, who knew him better than the rest of us, went on to Newport, and he says you couldn't be absolutely certain."

"But his own brother, his dentist, his fiancée, and ever so many others identified the body, the clothing, the jewelry, and the papers; how would you get round the papers found in his pockets? Of course, you won't take the brother's word, but if you will take mine you will not waste time on that scent."

"If you are prejudiced—" said Devin shrugging his shoulders.

"Have you ever known me to let prejudice stand in the way of justice?"

The attorney never had, but would not admit it; so Blount, wasting no words, left him, to go to his office. Here he found a detective waiting with a report; and with the report, what might prove to be the first real clue.

Blount took both, made a memorandum, and sent the man with a message to Mr. James Vendire and Mr. Charles Alexander.

Mr. James was the first to respond.

"I sent for you, Mr. Vendire," said Mr. Blount, after greeting him cordially, "to show you something just found by one of my scouts. He was exploring in the neighborhood of the old Alexander place, when, in a deserted log cabin on the Teufelstochter place adjoining, as he was turning over the dead leaves, he unearthed this;" and Mr. Blount produced a curious cane made of birch, splendidly carved, with an Indian's head on top, and on the flattened side an emblem of compass and square and the words, "Libby, 1864."

Mr. Vendire seized it in eager agitation. "My brother's cane! See, here are his initials," and he pointed to the lines tattoed on the Indian's face, where, minutely traced, were the letters, H. D. V."

"That's so," said Mr. Blount, looking closely.

"They were so twisted in the pattern that they escaped me. Your brother still owned it? Hadn't given it away?"

"Never in the world! He valued it too highly. It was carved by our father while a prisoner during the Civil War, and given to my brother because he bore the same name. He very seldom

used it. You say it was found in an old cabin? How did it get there?"

"I see I have raised hopes, Mr. Vendire, and I am sorry, as I do not attach much importance to the discovery. The report says that the owner of the place—a Mrs. Teufelstochter—asserts that she found it in her own woods; your brother probably dropped it during some walk, while he was visiting the Alexanders'."

"Are you sure it has no significance?"

"Almost. Your brother left the hotel on his bicycle, and bicyclers do not usually carry canes."

"I see," said Mr. Vendire, putting his hands over his eyes, wearily, then he added: "May I ask you a question, Mr. Blount? I am told that you never take a case without being convinced that your client is innocent. You do not know me. Why is it you are so wholly on my side?"

"I may not always know guilt when I see it," Mr. Blount replied, "but I know innocence; and if you are not an innocent man, I have never met one."

Touched to the quick, Mr. Vendire grasped the firm hand of the lawyer, unable to speak.

With a sort of tenderness in his face, Blount returned the pressure. "Another thing, Mr. Vendire, I wish to say before I forget it: you have retained me to help you discover the perpetrators of this dreadful crime; you may have been aware for

some days that an attempt will probably be made to implicate you; if you should be arrested, I want you to make your trial a separate case, only bringing me in as a witness. I believe, from certain indications, that I can serve you better as a witness than as a lawyer."

"You mean that out of sympathy and a desire to clear me you prefer not having charge of my personal defense? To whom, then, shall I apply?"

"Rumsey and Randolph, or any first class lawyers; Mr. Alexander can tell you all about them. However, that is further along. Don't engage anybody unless you are arrested."

Mr. Vendire then took leave, but had not been gone five minutes before Charles Alexander arrived.

He was greeted by a piece of gossip:

- "Good morning, Mr. Alexander, have you heard that your friend, Fred Poppy, is going to be married?"
- "Poppy married! What poor woman can be so deluded?"
- "He's making a fine match somebody you know. Any one else with a grudge against you?"
- "Surely you cannot mean my neighbor, the grass-widow? You take away my breath."
- "Thought I should. Would you like to see the cane she found on her place?" And Mr. Blount again displayed it.

"Does she say she found that cane on her place? Begging her pardon, I think she lies. She found it on my place. Horace Vendire had that cane two days before he met his death. He was out walking with Miss Frewe, and dropped it somewhere. They came back to the house in a hurry, because some snakes had frightened Diana. Then Vendire remembered he had left his cane, went back for it, but could not find it."

"Don't tell Miss Frewe I have it. You say she was frightened by snakes? By the way, how is Miss Frewe?"

"Somewhat improved. Have you seen her lately?"

"Not for some days. She promised to come with your wife to see my curiosities. Couldn't you arrange for to-morrow?"

Charles thought he could, and took leave.

Glad of any diversion for Diana, Constance sent word they would keep the engagement. Accordingly, the following afternoon saw the two in Mr. Blount's office. He was waiting, freshly shaved and clad in his Sabbath black, looking like a pious, well-fed deacon, without a care in the world.

In a position of prominence was the cane. Constance recognized it the moment she entered the room, and, fearful of the effect on Diana, innocently tried to fix her attention on more distant

curiosities. She made overt signs to Blount, which that worthy ignored.

Then Diana noticed it, and started in surprise. She looked at it quietly, intently, and said:

"I should think his brother would want that. It was carved by his own father."

"It is only a loan," said Blount; "some day I am going to give it back."

"Do you mind telling us how you got it?" asked Diana, hesitatingly.

" Not in the least," and Blount told them.

His visitors left him thoughtful. "That young lady, for all her delicate looks, has nerve. The last time she saw that cane was during one of her last interviews with her betrothed lover. That lover was murdered. He left her a tidy income. She hasn't, so far, added a penny to the reward offered by the family, and she handled this cane and talked about it as calmly as if it were any common peach-tree switch. I can't think she is in as deep grief as her black dress and her delicate health would lead one to suppose."

Then lawyer Blount sighed, and shook his head several times, as if contradicting himself. He needed a walk, and a long one, so he got his hat and went forth with a stride that meant miles.

As he turned a corner, a little boy in big clothes was looking in at a show window where there was a display of bicycles. His weazened, hickory-nut face was singularly colorless and unyouthful. He

had a city eye and a blasé look; but somewhere beneath the signs of age, one instinctively recognized a real boy. He was eating.

"Hello, Blinky, is this you?" said Blount.

At the salutation, the head turned quickly from the window, and a mouth, emphasized with jam. grinned broadly.

"Hello, pard," answered the boy; "I was jest

a lookin' for you."

"Did you expect to find me in that window? What do you want with me? I thought I ordered you to stay on that barrel."

"They druv me off, so I couldn't. I was a settin' en swingin' my legs for orl I was worth, when up come the two coves what you're havin' watched en tole me to git outer there; that they wouldn't have no loafers roun' that there office. If you say so, I kin hide behine the fence; you git most the same squint behine the fence."

"Wait, Blinky, what day of the month is this?"

"October 30th," answered Blinky, promptly.

"Well, don't forget that this is October 30th. You must go on watching those men. If they go to the Roxbury, you must go, too. You can get into the room; I'll fix that. You must notice particularly whether our men come there to spy. am going out of town to-morrow, and I want you to attend to business. If you need any help, get Yankee Burke. What day of the month is tomorrow?"



"October 31st," answered the child.

"Well, whatever you forget, don't forget that date — October 31st. You must not lose sight of those men one minute, unless what we are looking for should happen. You must hide behind the fence while they are at work, and you must look especially to see whether Mr. James Vendire comes there, if only for a second, and you must be ready to swear to the truth of all you have seen in court on your bible oath. Can I trust you?"

"I ain't never failed you yet, hev I?"

"Never! You are the best man I have ever employed, and some day you can put up a sign, and you'll be a chief in blue uniform and brass buttons."

"En a real silver star; don't forgit the star."

"Of course, a real silver star."

"En a chainless, coaster-brake, cushing-frame—"

"You want the earth, and you're talking too much. Take something to eat along."

"You bet!" called Blinky, as Blount strode out of sight.



CHAPTER IV

DIANA IS ALARMED

ON the 31st of October no one in Lewiston saw Mr. Blount. On the morning of November 1st a chemist called, and found him smoking a pipe at his desk.

"Have you brought the stopper?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, it was as I thought; belonged to a carboy of pure nitric acid."

"Is nitric acid used in foundries?"

"All the time. In polishing brass it is used pure, or at least very little diluted."

"And how about iron? Don't they put it in vats for electroplating iron?"

"They use sulphuric acid for iron. They clean it first before electroplating — diluted, of course."

"And suppose I should spill some undiluted nitric on my shoe?"

"I'd advise you not to try it; it would eat through leather and all."

"Burns, does it? What sort of a burn?"

"White-looking, like a scald, and extremely painful."

"Thank you," said Mr. Blount; "that is all, I believe."

Again Mr. Blount sought the Prosecuting Attorney. He had no sooner entered the door than Mr. Devin asked him what he was doing in the Vendire case.

"Just kinder moseying around and chirking up the force," Blount told him. "Complicated case, that. So much time lost at first. You heard anything?"

"There's no use telling you, even if I have; you are dead set against my hypothesis."

Mr. Blount showed no displeasure. "I give you a clear field there; you will find you are wasting time."

The attorney laughed. "Are you still crying hands off? We sent for you yesterday, but could not find you."

"Anything of importance?"

"Only this," answered Devin, with feigned carelessness, taking a paper from his desk.

It was a warrant for the arrest of Mr. James Vendire, charging him with complicity in the murder of his brother, Horace Vendire.

"This is an awful accusation, Mr. Devin. You ought to be very sure before you attempt to prove it. When are you going to serve the warrant?"

"To-day, I think. It is awful, Mr. Blount, and I would not take a step without being sure that I had something under me. Little Gunn —

DIANA IS ALARMED

promising fellow, employed by the Mundane — gave us a straight tip yesterday! in fact, shadowed

Mr. James Vendire under most peculiar circumstances, that he will have to explain in court."

"Mr. Devin, will you take a piece of advice?"

"That depends."

"Do you like to be laughed at?"

"Not particularly; why?"

"Then don't have that warrant served."

"See here, Mr. Blount, you carry your infatuation too far. I would tell you what a plain case we have, but it is Gunn's work, and the little fellow is so pleased over it that I have promised to let it all come out in court. I'll say this much: there is no shadow of doubt."

"Isn't there? I am going out of town tonight; can't you wait until I get back?"

"I do not see any use in running the risk of losing our man."

"Well, remember I warned you. Good-bye. Don't let your little Gunn go off half-cocked," and, Blount marched out of the house.

The warrant was not served until the next day. Mr. James Vendire actually smiled when he saw the sheriff, and accompanied him without protest. At the jail he was shown every consideration. He immediately sent for Messrs. Rumsey and Randolph, and Charles Alexander. Upon consultation it was decided to make no application for bail as the examining trial was to take place at once.

Charles reached the jail as the lawyers were leaving. Mr. James gave them a New York address, and asked them to notify Mr. Blount of his arrest.

"Mr. Blount out of town?" asked Mr. Randolph.

"He had to go off last night, but dropped in at the Roxbury on the way to the station, remarking in that casual way he has, "If you should get into any trouble while I am away, tell your lawyers I would like a chance on the witness stand."

"You are in luck, Mr. Vendire; Mr. Blount believes in you, and with him, to believe is to

support."

Charles spent several hours with the prisoner. They talked of many things — of Mr. Blount, where they met on equal grounds, not only as staunch friends, but as enthusiastic admirers of the lawyer. Then, knowing that Constance and Diana would be anxious for news, Charles said good-bye, and went to his flat.

He found the two women agitated and eager.

"They've arrested him at last," said he, "but we hope it will clear up things and forever quiet suspicion."

"How does he bear it?" asked Constance.

"With dignity and calmness. It is rather a relief than otherwise; he has faced the possibility for many days."

"But jail!" cried Constance. "Think of what

his poor wife must feel! It would kill me."

"What precipitated it?" asked Diana.

"Some discovery a little fellow named Gunn thinks he has made. He and the express agent have been on the lookout for a scoop for weeks."

After this conversation, Diana sought a private interview with Charles.

- "Don't say anything to worry Constance, but do you think by any chance I may be wanted as awitness?"
- "I think not. While evidence brought out at the inquest must be repeated in the examining trial, you were not present at the official enquiry, and only went later to make sure of the letters found on the body."

"And you," said Diana, quickly—"he was your guest at the time; will they want you?"

- "I hope not; for it might bring out that last scene in my office, and it would be most painful for me to be compelled to tarnish a dead man's honor in his brother's hearing."
 - "Won't Poppy and Cabell tell of that?"
- "I wish they would! It would be a confession, and give me a hold on the Trust that I would like to have."
- "Charles, have you ever thought that perhaps—people are so suspicious you know—perhaps if they heard what you heard and saw that night, and about the note, knowing that you left the hotel on his very heels, as it were, they might think that

— that — I hardly like to speak my thought for — of course there was nothing — that you met him somewhere and that — that you know something about his disappearance?"

Charles was astounded. "How can I have been so stupid! It is highly probable, though such an idea has never occurred to me. Of course, not knowing which way he went, as he was my guest at the time, it might be thought he went to Hillside and that I met him. But be tranquil. No one is going to tell of the discoveries of that night. The two rascals, the directors of the American Blade and Trigger Company, and you and Constance, are the only living persons who know of them. Horace Vendire must have destroyed my note — he naturally would — as it was not found either in his room or on his person."

Diana turned away her face, as if pained. "You have not even told Mr. Blount?"

- "I thought of it, but, since there is nothing to be gained thereby, I concluded I would wait awhile. In this case silence is solid gold, and I do not want another damage suit.
- "What person would bring another damage suit?"
- "Who but the American Blade and Trigger Company? You know I had no witnesses."

CHAPTER V.

THE COMMONWEALTH VERSUS JAMES VENDIRE

THE preliminary examination of Mr. James Vendire, charged with conspiracy to murder, was invested with prime importance by reason of the fact becoming known that his attorneys had determined from the start to prove his innocence so conclusively that his case would never be carried to the grand jury. As a consequence, the City Police Court room held a packed crowd of morbidly curious idlers.

Mr. James Vendire, hitherto honored and honorable, winced just a trifle when he heard the buzzing comment caused by his entrance; but he held his head high, and his calm, refined face showed neither nervousness nor anxiety, while his lawyers displayed an unassumed cheerfulness that argued well for their client.

Not so with Attorney Devin. He had heard things, and he could not help remembering with uneasiness the lawyer's warning. He wished he had forced Blount to be more explicit; now he had taken himself off, and it was too late. Still he had a clear case — circumstantial, to be sure, but plainly convincing.

Charles Alexander arrived, just as Mr. Devin was beginning his statement for the Commonwealth. He had resolved not to miss a word of the proceedings, not only on account of his sympathy for the prisoner, but from a personal anxiety following Diana's suggestion. For a time, he would be forced to shift all business matters upon George's compliant shoulders, as in this courtroom lay both his interest and his duty.

Mr. Devin began with a recapitulatory statement of the case, and then dilated upon the horror of the murder, in a burst of pathos which brought applause from the spectators and a reprimand from the judge.

After the room became quiet, Mr. Devin went on to say that, on October 31st, a package was sent to Mrs. James Vendire, 11001 Riverside Drive, New York, by a carefully disguised man. In view of the contents of the trunk, it was deemed advisable to detain this package in New York before delivering it to the wife of the suspected man. The contents of the package, taken in connection with the trunk, were such as to warrant the arrest of the prisoner on the charge of Conspiracy to Murder.

The Commonwealth was prepared to prove the identity of the prisoner and the man sending both trunk and package.

They would claim that the body was sent for the purpose of satisfying the insurance companies that

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Horace Vendire was really dead, and that the package was sent for the purpose of ridding the prisoner of incriminating articles of clothing.

Furthermore, while they had not yet discovered the hour or the manner of the murder, they would prove that the two brothers were not on good terms at the time of the disappearance, though the prisoner was aware that an insurance policy for one hundred thousand dollars had been taken for his benefit some two years before, and that, while he had every reason to fear it, this policy had never been either canceled or transferred.

Finally, they would prove that the prisoner had arrived in Lewiston at 9:55 o'clock on the night of August 28th (or the night of the disappearance), but that he had not inquired for his brother until late the next morning, although his hotel, the Roxbury was only a few steps from the Dinsmore, where his brother was stopping; and that he, the prisoner, had not appeared at the Roxbury until some three hours after his arrival in town, this time including the period in which his brother had left the Dinsmore, never to return.

When Mr. Devin sat down, Mr. Randolph for the prisoner pleaded "not guilty," and stated that in rebuttal they were prepared to prove that the brothers were on friendly terms; that, while their policies in business were widely dissimilar, yet the deceased had on several occasions assisted their client, and at the time of his disappearance was on the point of advancing money and sharing with him a business risk entailing an outlay of between ten and fifteen thousand dollars. In proof of which they would bring witnesses and offer as evidence certain letters that passed between the brothers.

Again, while they would admit the prisoner's knowledge of the former issuance of an insurance policy, they would claim that he was surprised at the amount of that policy, and at the fact that, in spite of his brother's approaching marriage, he still remained the beneficiary.

In conclusion, they were prepared to show that the prisoner was an upright, God-fearing man—a man who, by his very nature would be incapable of committing the crime, as charged. The court permitting, he would account for every moment of his time on the night of August 28th, 1900, would prove his innocence of all connection with either trunk or package.

The case being thus stated by the counsel, for the respective parties, the court took a recess.

Charles was promptly on hand when the court opened its afternoon session. The first step of the Commonwealth was to bring out evidence that had already been given at the inquest in New York—testimony of servants, and others, who had identified the body.

After the first new witnesses had had their say (they were principally railway clerks and guards.

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and hotel clerks, testifying to the prisoner's arrival in Lewiston), Charles was surprised to hear the name of Mr. Frederick Y. Poppy called.

Mr. Poppy came in without delay. He was well-dressed, and bore an air of unusual prosperity.

After the customary preliminaries, Mr. Devin said:

"Now Mr. Poppy, I will ask you to tell the court all that occurred, August 26th, 1900, bearing on this case."

Poppy began:

"On the day of August 26th, 1900, I was visiting a lady friend at her country-place. The lady was Mrs. Teufelstochter. About sunset, as the weather was mild and clear and the moon shining, I proposed a stroll in the woods. place adjoining Mrs. Teufelstochter's is owned by a party with whom she has had some dispute concerning the boundary, and for this reason the fences were in an imperfect condition, many of them being down. Without knowing it, we wandered into the grounds of this gentleman; that is, we suppose we did from subsequent happenings, although, as it was evening and shadowy, we cannot say positively where we were; the undergrowth is very thick, and the woods so dense round there that we have no means of knowing. One spot is just like another. Well, while we were walking, we heard voices; and thinking we had come upon

the court, the prisoner's counsel

Mr. Poppy was then allowed gave his own version of the con Miss Frewe and Mr. Horace V casion when Diana was frighten

"We object, your Honor, to all the prisoner's counsel; "it has no the case."

The objection being noted, the saying: "The deceased asserted guage that his brother was a spen not deserve anything at all; and t because he was his brother that h leave him anything. At this point I, realizing that we had been inad dropping, purposely made a distir bushes. You see, if we had show would have been as embarassing for so we took this way. Miss Frewe when she heard it, and ran off, fo Vendire."

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— clumsily, it must be feared — to do him a good turn by urging her fiancé to settle with Alexander and Company. But his chief feeling was the conviction that Diana would probably be wanted by one side or the other. It would be painfully embarassing, and must be prevented, if possible.

The cross-questioning began by Mr. Rumsey saying:

- "Mr. Poppy, I understood you to say that you and Mrs. Teufelstochter were strolling on that lady's grounds in the cool of the evening by the light of the moon of August 26th, 1900?"
 - "Yes, sir."
 - "On whose grounds?"
- "We thought on ours—on Mrs. Teufelstochter's grounds—but think we may have been on her neighbor's, as the fences were down and we couldn't tell."
 - "Who was that neighbor?"

The question was objected to, but the objection was overruled.

- "Mr. Charles Alexander."
- "The same gentleman whom you sued for damages last year, failing to get a verdict?"
 - "If we were on his ground, we didn't know it."
- "Had you known it, you wouldn't have been there?"
- "Most certainly not!" said Poppy, with an attempt at haughtiness, a difficult matter for one of his build.

"Well, you and Mrs. Teufelstochter were wandering over the land of the gentleman whom you have every reason to hate, when you heard voices and stepped behind some bushes to listen?"

"Not to listen. When a body is surprised, he naturally is cautious and wants to find out what is

surprising him."

"Very good. As I remember, you thought you heard tramps, and you hid until they could get past."

"Exactly."

"Knowing tramps' ways, you were cautious; you thought you had better see who was talking before you showed yourselves."

"Yes, sir."

"But when you found that you had made a mistake, and that the parties, instead of being tramps, were a lady and a gentleman engaged in private conversation, what was your course?"

"We were so surprised that we were unable to do anything; we were paralyzed."

"Ah! You were paralyzed; so, while you were waiting to recover, the conversation ended."

" It didn't end."

"It didn't? Let me see whether I understood you; you and your companion happened to be on the ground of your enemy, Charles Alexander, when you happened to overhear a conversation between two lovers. Then you purposely moved, and that movement so frightened the young lady

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that she hurriedly left the spot with Mr. Vendire."

"Yes, sir."

"You purposely moved, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"While you were paralyzed? That will do, Mr. Poppy." And, red as his name, Poppy left the stand.

The next witness was a Mrs. Emily Lisle, a boarder at the Roxbury, who testified that while dining at the same table with Mr. James Vendire and Mr. Alexander, the latter drew her attention to a gentleman at another table, saying that he was one of the managers of The Mundane Insurance Company, the same that was contesting Mr. Vendire's claim for his brother's insurance.

"What will you do, if they don't pay it?" Mrs. Lisle had asked of Mr. James Vendire.

"Just what I have always done," he had replied. "It surprised me to find I was entitled to it, for, although I knew some years ago that my brother had a policy in my favor, as soon as I heard he was engaged to be married I thought, of course, he would have it transferred."

Mr. Devin asked: "Did Mr. James Vendire say anything, Mrs. Lisle, about his brother's being miserly and stingy?"

"Not that I remember."

"Think again, Mrs. Lisle. Did not you afterwards say to a certain Mr. Cabell, who will be introduced later—"

At this point the counsel for the prisoner interrupted with an objection, which being sustained, the Commonwealth amended the question:

"Did not Mr. James Vendire pretend to express surprise at his brother's generosity, saying that he had changed his mind so often and was so stingy about money matters, that, while he had known about the insurance, he had never really expected it?"

"You have been misinformed; he said nothing about changeableness or stinginess in my presence."

The witness was here turned over to the defendant's counsel, but Mr. Rumsey said: "We have no questions to ask; we are more than satisfied with the witness's testimony."

The next witness called was Mr. Arthur Cabell, who appeared as prosperous and as well-dressed as his wont, though a certain puffy look about his face suggested dissipation. After a short, whispered conference with his colleague, Mr. Devin announced that the witness would be excused at present from testifying, and Charles saw Mr. Rumsey smile broadly.

The next to be called was Mrs. Jane Teufelstochter, and that lady mounted the stand with gusto. Evidently this was an opportunity not to be despised.

With exaggerated gallantry, Mr. Devin assisted her to the witness chair, from which point of van-

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tage she faced the crowd, as unembarassed by their gaping numbers as his Honor himself.

Being duly sworn, and discreetly prompted by Mr. Devin, she was asked to repeat the conversation heard by her and Mr. Poppy on the evening of August 26th, 1900.

The witness related a story substantially the same as Poppy's—the overheard conversation, the bargain, the wedding date fixed, the will, the contempt for the accused. Then she concluded:

"At this point I inadvertently moved, and the dead leaves or something rustled against my dress, and so frightened the lady that she ran away."

The cross-examination began.

From Mr. Rumsey: "You say, Mrs. Teufelstochter, that while you were listening to the conversation before related you accidentally made a rustling sound in the leaves."

" I said so."

"Now if Mr. Poppy in his cross-examination says that the sound was made purposely, to save embarassment on both sides, then you and he differ?"

"If Mr. Poppy said such a thing, we certainly do. I had on a starched skirt, that rustled when it brushed against the leaves."

"And at the noise, the lady fled in terror? Did you call to her not to be alarmed, or did you announce or explain your presence in any way?"

- "She was so scared, and ran away so quick, we hadn't time."
- "Ah! She ran did she? And the gentleman, Mr. Horace Vendire, did he run too?"
 - "Yes, he ran after her."
 - "Both ran?"
 - "I have already said they both ran."
- "You did not have time to explain or apologize?"
 - "Not a bit of time."
- "Because they were running away as hard as ever they could tear."
- "Is it necessary to repeat that I said they both ran?"
- "Now, Mrs. Teufelstochter, I will ask you to describe the spot where this conversation took place."

Mr. Devin objected with all his might, but after much arguing the objection was overruled.

- "Well, as near as I could see in the twilight, it was a very pretty spot. The cliff and the vines were at the back."
 - " Is the cliff sloping?"
 - "No; very steep."
 - "And high? How high?"
- "About sixty or seventy feet, I should judge."
- "How do you get down? I mean, starting from the Alexander house, which way would Miss Frewe and her lover take?"

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- "There is only one way from the house over the field to the point where the cows have made a zigzag path from the pasture down into the ravine to the spring."
 - "Pretty steep, however?"

"Yes, real steep."

- "How far from this path in the cliff were Miss Frewe and Mr. Vendire?"
- "I couldn't say exactly the bushes are so thick but some distance, I should say."
- "You speak of thick bushes; what kind of bushes?"
 - "Weeds, burrs, and things."
 - "Do they grow on smooth ground?"

"Very wild and rocky ground."

"Rocks sticking through the soil at intervals all along?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet I understand you to say that the young lady and her lover ran over this rough place and up the zigzag path so fast that you had no time to show yourselves or apologize for the intrusion?"

Mrs. Teufelstochter was furious at being trapped, but controlled herself, and answered:

- "When a person's scared they don't stop to pick their way; they just get out as fast as ever they can."
- "When Miss Frewe heard the noise, did she scream or cry out?"

"She screamed out very loud, 'A snake! A snake! and then ran off, he following."

"She thought you and Mr. Poppy were snakes in the grass?"

And amid laughter, Mrs. Teufelstochter was allowed to withdraw.

As court then adjourned until the following morning, Charles sought the prisoner's counsel, with a face full of anxiety.

"I don't see how we are going to keep from bringing Miss Frewe into this," he said, ruefully. "She is weak, and half ill; can you manage to spare her?"

"Trying as it will be, I fear she will have to come. If she can refute those people, it will be a point for the accused. You see, if we don't call her, the other side may, and we had better be the ones to do it. We will make it as light as possible."

Charles went home to warn Diana, and was not surprised at her agitation.

"I can't! I can't!" she cried. "I shall be too frightened to think, and I might harm some one!"

"You must get rid of that idea," said Charles, who knew her character. "You will have a day or two before you are called, so resolve to be cool and collected. I know your will, and will is power."

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"It will be awful to have to tell about that evening."

"Poor child, I know it! How much of the

Poppy-Teufelstochter interview is true?"

- "Almost all is partly true. He did not say his brother was a spendthrift, but he intimated he was leaving him the insurance because of the near relationship. About my consenting to fix a date with reluctance that is false; I did it gladly. 'Tis true I referred to my past repugnance, but he explained that, and assured me that he was satisfied that I truly loved him and I I admitted it."
- "Dear girl; and so you knew something of my troubles even then, and were trying to influence him?"
 - "Yes, Charles; was it wrong of me?"

"Had you often talked of me?"

- "Only incidentally. You see"—and Diana grew rosy—"he knew me like a book, and either because he really was interested, or to please me, he encouraged me to tell him even the smallest events in my life; and as much of my time was spent in your house, I naturally talked of you and Constance."
- "And wrote of us too," thought Charles, a light breaking; but he could have sworn she was an unconscious tool in the hands of the Trust, and he hoped she might never learn.

- "And to think those scoundrels were hiding!"
- "Oh, Charles! It must not be," cried Diana, quivering as if she were already facing court. "We must help Mr. James some other way. Don't you see that this examination may lead to certain questions, and that I might say something that would get some one else into trouble, even if I did not hurt myself?"
- "Diana, you are keeping back something. If you know anything else that has any bearing on this case, tell me. Of what are you afraid? Don't you know I love you as if you were Constance's own sister?"
- "I know it, and it is because of Constance that I have never told. You must not tell her; I couldn't bear it!"
 - "I won't, if it would hurt her. Go on."
- "You remember the night of August 28th, when you walked out in the mud, and found me on the bed in Constance's room?"
- "Yes, you had both been frightened by the storm."
- "She had been, but I had a far worse cause for fear."
 - "Indeed! What was it?"
- "I was frightened because I because I had just had an interview in the dead of night with a man who had sworn that he could prove you were dishonorable; that he had it in his power to ruin you and Constance; and that if I did not leave the

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house with him then and there, he would disgrace you publicly."

"And you refused?"

"Forgive me, Charles, I am so silly about some matters, and his tale was circumstantial, and, I thought, plausible. I consented. His over me when I was with him was unlimited, and remember, whatever I felt afterwards, I loved him then. I begged a delay on account of the approaching storm which would have made all sorts of discomfort. I suppose it was my vanity that made me urge the storm; I didn't wish to be an ugly bride; my hair doesn't curl naturally, and the dampness -- " Here Diana laughed hysterically. "But he had to be content with a promise to meet him in town, early the next morning (he had seen you in town; he did not think you would come out in the threatening weather), and then he left, and you came."

"And that man was Horace Vendire?"

Diana nodded. Her chattering teeth would emit no sound.

"Good God! Diana! As far as we know, you were the last person on earth who saw him alive!"

CHAPTER VI

SOME STRANGE EVIDENCE

THOUGH, so far, nothing sensational had been displayed, the interest in the Vendire trial continued unabated. The crowd waited patiently for hours, packed like sheep in an atmosphere so foul that it seemed on first entering the courtroom that human lungs could not inhale it; for it had been rumored that the beautiful Miss Frewe, the former fiancée of the dead man, and heiress to part of his fortune, would be called to the stand.

However, before Miss Frewe's name could be reached, the audience in that stuffy courtroom had weightier matters to interest them.

First was the testimony of Hilton Craft, agent for the Universal Express Company, with an office on the corner of Main and Elm streets, in the Union Station building.

Mr. Craft was a brawny, muscular fellow, with a bulldog look. He had one hand in a bandage, and was unable to move the fingers. He responded promptly to his name, and gave his testimony lucidly, tersely, although a certain heaving of his broad chest showed that he was fully aware he was jeopardizing a human life.

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At about twelve o'clock on the morning of October 31st, Mr. Craft was in his office, booking packages for a number of people, when he was called to the telephone by Mr. Gunn, a detective employed by the Mundane Insurance Company, who told him to be on the lookout for a party who would book a package addressed to Mrs. Tames Vendire, 11001 Riverside Drive, New York. The party did not appear until just before the New York mail was about to leave. He had his collar pulled up, and his hat pulled down; his shoes were rusty, and his hands smeared with dirt to make them look rough; but in spite of the evident attempt at disguise Mr. Craft had recognized him as the same man who had expressed the trunk. was the prisoner. He pretended to be in a great hurry to get the package off by that train, made Craft book it, prepaid charges, and gave as the sender's name, Hayden Doyle - all shown in the company's books, offered in evidence.

Obeying instructions, Mr. Craft gave a regular receipt, thinking the fellow would go away and thus give him an opportunity to detain the package for examination; but as he did not leave until he saw it put on the train, Craft had to let it go. As soon as the so-called Mr. Doyle left, witness telephoned to the detective, and all remaining responsibility concerning the package rested with him.

A short cross-examination by Mr. Rumsey

failed to develop anything, but at the close, that gentleman said:

"I see your hand is bandaged, Mr. Craft; is it a wound?"

"Yes, I mashed it while handling heavy boxes."
"Would you mind letting the court see it?"

Mr. Devin objected impatiently. "We don't see what you are driving at, and you are consuming valuable time."

Judge Bentham being of like mind, the objection was sustained and the witness allowed to leave.

After Craft, came one Tom Springer, a negro owning an express wagon. He swore that on the 11th day of September, sometime in the morning after nine o'clock, he was at his stand in front of the courthouse, when a gentleman bargained with him to take a trunk to the Union Station and offered him a quarter. He agreed, and was told to drive to a certain number on Creek Street, fronting the levee; there he was met by the gentleman in an empty warehouse, where he found the trunk. was a big black trunk. Heavy? Yes: must have weighed two hundred pounds. Gentleman said it had books in it, and helped get it into the wagon himself. Took the trunk to the station and unloaded it, got his money and left. Didn't know whether he would know the gentleman again ves, there sat a man that favored him unerringly pointing to the prisoner. Could he point out the trunk? He could and did from some dozen other trunks.

The next witness was Mr. Paulus Gunn, a little, pale-faced fellow, who looked as if Nature had intended him to be tall, but had changed her mind when she got down to his legs. Mr. Gunn had been employed by the Mundane to shadow Mr. James Vendire, and had taken a room at the Roxbury, where his bathroom had adjoined that of Mr. Vendire, with a wooden partition between. Small gimlet holes had enabled him to see through the bathroom into the bedroom beyond, and he had, as it were, lived with the prisoner.

Mr. Gunn described minutely how he had seen the second package prepared and addressed, on the morning of October 31st, 1900. He had telephoned instructions to the express agent, who had long before identified the prisoner as the man who had sent the trunk, under the name of Frederick Long, to Newport, September 11th, Craft telephoned him that he had been obliged to let the package go, and the witness had then sent a telegram to New York, with instructions to the police. Upon learning its contents, he had communicated with the Prosecuting Attorney, who had had a warrant sworn out for the arrest of the prisoner.

Here Mr. Devin rose solemnly.

"May it please your Honor, the next evidence is the contents of the package itself." It was

brought in. The attorney prepared to argue against a score of objections, but the prisoner's counsel sat as if stricken dumb.

Then Mr. Devin displayed underwear, trousers, and flannel shirt — blood-stained — calling many witnesses to identify them as having belonged to the dead man, and many others to prove that they were almost exact duplicates of the clean clothing found on the body sent in the trunk.

"Now," said Mr. Devin, raising his eyes, as if in appeal to heaven, "who has had access to the dead man's clothing? And to rid himself of incriminating evidence, who is the man who has had recourse to two such bold expedients?"

The fagged audience had its sensation. All eyes turned to the prisoner, and mutterings filled the air. Mr. Vendiré sat as quietly as if listening to a fairy tale, his head thrown back, his expression gravely dignified, except for the shadow of a contemptuous smile.

The defense made a formal motion to dismiss which was overruled and the court took a recess until afternoon.

Indignation against the prisoner ran fever-high. A mob of ruffians gathered and was with difficulty kept in check. Before the hour of the afternoon session of the court, the sheriff deemed it best to use strategy to protect the prisoner, so kept a carriage and guards waiting in front, while he slipped his man into court by another way.

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There had been some question as to whether the prisoner would be allowed to testify in his own behalf; the crowd was therefore breathless with interest when his was the first name called by the defense.

As he mounted the stand, scores of hostile faces gaped at him. But one friend he had. Charles Alexander raised his hand in token of recognition, and the prisoner smiled a bright, appreciative smile, marvelously transforming to his rather severe features.

Then began a long and tedious examination.

Not once did Mr. James flag or falter, as he accounted for every moment of his time from the night of August 28th up to nine o'clock the next morning. He had come to Lewiston to obtain his brother's assistance in urgent business In proof of this, the correspondence preceding the visit was offered and allowed as evidence. The most significant letters (handwriting identified by Mr. Claws et al.) were two - one in which the deceased requested his brother to be in Lewiston not later than August 29th if he wished his help, saying as it then appeared to him, he would have no objection to putting up ten or fifteen thousand dollars for the sake of future profits; also one containing the announcement of his approaching marriage, and mentioning the fact that he was staying at the Alexanders' place in the country, so as to be with his fiancée, who was also

a guest in the same house. On his arrival, the prisoner had not known that his brother had failed to leave town that night, consequently had not sought him.

The prisoner then denied all knowledge of the package; he had seen it for the first time that morning in court.

He made this denial in a manner so solemnly impressive that not a few of his hearers asked themselves whether, after all, there was not something wrong about the evidence of Craft and Gunn.

Mr. Devin had winced and objected to the letters, but to no effect. They were admitted and filed.

Then the sheriff cried, "Mr. Hodgkiss Blodson," and there entered a small boy — so small that there was an audible titter as he climbed to the high chair. In nowise abashed, he turned to the audience and grinned. It was Blinky, with a scoured face, and a neck showing a high-water mark of dirt above a roomy, brightly-glazed shirt-collar.

- "What is your name?" asked Mr. Rumsey.
- "Hodgkiss Blodson," was the answer, in a chirpy little voice, "mostly called Blinky."
 - "Well, Blinky, where were you born?"
 - "Don' know sir."
 - "How old are you?"
 - "Don' know thet, sir."
 - "Who was your father?"

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"He was a railway maggot."

"A what!"

"He druv — streetcar, till he got 'lected."

"Elected to what?"

"Elected? Don' you know? The juice ran down his arm en killed him."

"Juice?"

"'Lectricity - same thing."

"Ah! I understand."

By this time, there was so much laughter that Mr. Devin's protesting voice could not be heard. When quiet was restored, he made it clear that the Commonwealth could not let the witness go unchallenged, as he had displayed such ignorance it was plain he could not know the nature of an oath. After a wrangle lasting an hour and a quarter the objection was overruled.

"Now Blinky," pursued Mr. Rumsey, in great good-humor, "just tell the court how you spent the morning and afternoon of October 31st, 1900."

But Blinky, sitting in the big chair, was fast asleep.

The sheriff roused him with a shake. Blinky, rubbing his eyes and making a funny little bob, said:

"Excuse me ladies and gents en,"—with a sudden inspiration,— "honners, for bein' so dozy, but I've been up so many nights over this here case thet I'm takin' ever' minit I kin to ketch up." "I'll repeat my question," said Mr. Rumsey. Blinky, tell the court how you spent the day of October 31st, 1900."

"Mostly behine a fence, en eatin'," was the

answer.

"Very good; where was the fence?"

"'T Union Station."

"Why were you behind it?"

"'Cause Mr. Blount tole me to watch ever' body what come to the 'spress office."

"Are you an employee of Mr. Blount?"

"Hur? Yes — of cose — cert'ny. Mr. Blount sometimes has jobs for me."

"As I understand, then, you assist Mr. Blount every time he requires your kind of help? Just tell the court what your line is."

"My line is to do jest exactly what Mr. Blount tells me ter, en nothin' besides."

"Why did Mr. Blount wish you to stay behind the fence, October 31st, 1900?"

"So 't I could keep track of ever' body what come to th' 'spress office."

"How long were you there?"

"From six mornin' tell three evenin'."

"How near were you to the place where the people come to express their parcels?"

"Bout as near as ter thet winder. The place where they come is a sorter big, wide winder, en I was off behine the fence, a little to one side. I'd

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er been there longer, only Yankee Burke — he's 'nother of us detectives — come en made me a sign to foller the agent, who was snoopin' round to the Roxbury; so I went after him."

"Why did you obey Yankee Burke?"

"'Cause Mr. Blount said thet he was goin' out of town, and thet Yank would let me know when to go to the Roxbury."

"Do you know why he wanted you to go to the Roxbury, instead of staying behind the fence?"

"Not exactly; he don't tell me all his cases — Mr. Blount don't. Likes me to guess; says it's er edgycashun."

"And what was it Mr. Blount said before he went away?"

"He says, 'Blinky, jest hang eroun' thet there bloomin' station near the 'spress office ter watch it en see ef our man sends off somethin', en do whatever else Yankee Burke says, 'cause termorrer I'm a-goin' outer town, en you'll have to keep your eyes skint!'"

"And did your man come?"

"Nit, he never did."

"Did anybody that looked like him come?"

"Thet warn't my game. Mr. Blount tells me to notice ef Mr. Vendire come, en I notice thet he didn't."

"You are acquainted with Mr. Vendire?"

"Gee! I should smile!"

" Is he here now?"

A grimy forefinger pointed to the prisoner. "Thet's him."

- "Where have you met him?"
- "Mr. Blount interduced him, en says, 'Blinky, this here's Mr. Vendire, en I want you ter look at him clost en see where he goes, en who's er follerin' him."
 - "And did you obey?"
- "Yes sir-ee! I've been follerin' his follerers for days en nights, sometimes with Yankee Burke en sometimes without."
 - "Who were they?"

Here the State interposed with a flood of objections, which, after a heated discussion, the court sustained. Then Mr. Rumsey said:

- "Well, never mind Blinky; continue your story."
- "I'm orful sorry ef you wont let me tell about the follerin; en the smoke, en the groan, 'cause then I can't tell about the cloes thet I saw Agent Craft en Mr. Gunn—"
 - "Stop that!" roared Devin.
- "'Cause, ef you won't, the rest of my story won't git telled. It's like runnin' inter a lamppost 'thout a brake jest knocks you clean off."
- "That will do Blinky. Will the Commonwealth take the witness?" asked Mr. Rumsey, in much the same tone as he would have said: "Will the Commonwealth take a tarantula?"

Mr. Devin settled himself in his chair, pulled

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down his cuffs, cleared his throat, and began,

pompously:

"Well, Mr. Blodgkiss Hodson, did I understand you to say that you were employed officially by Mr. Blount to hide behind a fence at the Union Station, October 31st, in a position that would enable you to see the window of the Universal Express Company's office?"

Blinky looked straight ahead, as if he heard

not.

"Did you hear my question?"

Continued dumbness on the part of Blinky.

"If you don't answer me, I'll have you jailed for contempt."

Blinky looked sideways over his shoulder at Judge Bentham, and said in a confidential tone:

"Say, yer Honner, does I have to answer questions asked some other feller?"

"What do you mean?" asked the judge, kindly.

"I mean jest this: my name's not Blodgkiss Hodson, but Hodgkiss Blodson — or Blinky, ef he prefers it — en he needn't forgit it."

"Does your Honor allow such impertinence in

your court?" asked the furious Devin.

Judge Bentham smiled.

"The court holds that, while Mr. Hodgkiss Blodson's objection is not couched in legal terms, it is a perfectly valid one; no witness can be compelled to answer a question not addressed to him."

At which Devin, too provoked to be wise, turned

his back on Blinky, saying that he did not care to examine such a witness.

The crowd snickered, Blinky climbed down from his perch, and, as he passed behind the Prosecuting Attorney, put his two hands, tandem-wise before his nose, and disappeared in the audience.

After Blinky, came one Mr. Henry Wolfe, who testified that he was the senior partner in Wolfe and Company's Brass and Iron Works, making architectural fixtures and doing electroplating of various kinds. In response to a question from the defense, he began to decribe the location of the foundry, but was interrupted by an objection from the Commonwealth as to such testimony being irrelevant.

The judge was disposed to sustain the objection, but agreed to permit it upon Mr. Randolph's promising to prove the very closest connection between such evidence and the case.

The location of the works was described by Mr. Wolfe as adjoining the railway station and the express office. The defense then put the following questions:

"We understand, Mr. Wolfe, that in your industry, you make use of acids for cleaning and polishing metals; may I ask what kind?"

"We use several kinds — nitric for brass, and sulphuric or muriatic for the iron."

"Very good; have you had any trouble about these acids of late?"

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"We have had a dispute with the Purity Company about an invoice of nitric which we received one carboy short. They claim that the order was properly filled, but we haven't yet been able to trace the missing carboy."

"Are the stoppers to these carboys distinguishable from those of other firms?"

"Yes. Every one has the company's trademark on the clay of the stopper, as well as the label on the carboy itself."

"What is the trade-mark?"

"' P. C.' and a magnet."

"I have here several kinds of carboy stoppers; do you see any belonging to the Purity Company?"

Mr. Wolfe immediately selected one, and Mr. Randolph showed the trade-mark to the court and asked that this particular stopper be admitted as evidence. After objections, this was conceded.

Mr. Devin then took the witness.

"Do you know the prisoner, Mr. Wolfe?"

"No, I have never seen him before this trial."

"Were you acquainted with Mr. Horace Vendire?"

"Never heard of him until I read of this murder in the papers."

"Do you know what bearing your testimony has on this case?"

This question was objected to by the prisoner's counsel, who would show later, by competent witnesses, what bearing it had on the case. The ob-

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jection was sustained, and this ended Mr. Wolfe's testimony.

His partner was called, and corroborated him in every particular, as did the foreman of the electroplating department.

During these examinations the counsel for the Commonwealth yawned audibly; the large audience also showed signs of boredom, but there was a palpable brightening up when the name of the next witness was called:

" Mr. Theodore Blount."

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CHAPTER VII

MR. BLOUNT TELLS HIS STORY

WHEN Devin heard Blount's name, he fidgeted and whispered to his colleague, "He's back, and he's up to something."

Mr. Rout reassured him: "They cannot get over the trunk and the package. He may try a trick or two, but we have a clear case."

The capacious form of the lawyer filled the chair, and his long legs sprawled over the platform. Placing his hands with his thumbs and forefingers touching, he waited.

After the usual formal interrogatories, Mr. Randolph began:

"Now Mr. Blount, will you be kind enough to tell us all you know bearing on this case?"

To which the witness replied as follows:

"About a month after the disappearance of Mr. Horace Vendire, when the detectives were following all sorts of trails, I heard that suspicion pointed to the prisoner. As far as I could learn, the chief grounds for believing that Mr. James Vendire knew more than he would tell were that he had arrived in Lewiston on the night of the disappearance, under circumstances then unexplained, and

because he was known to be one of the chief heirs of his brother. I made it my business to meet him, and my first impression was that he was innocent. He told me the story you have already heard, and I carefully verified it in every particular. After that, I had no hesitation in trying to help him find his brother's murderers. I advised him to remain silent until he was openly accused, and, in my hearing, he has frequently expressed a wish for the opportunity to clear himself that is now being given to him."

At this point, a policeman entered at the back of the room, and, attracting the notice of the witness, held up two fingers. Blount nodded, and continued his testimony:

"Mr. Gunn and Mr. Craft have sworn, the one that the prisoner sent both trunk and package, the other that he saw the prisoner prepare the package, and both that the prisoner sent off the package at noon on October 31st. Blinky has sworn that he was hanging round the express office from six until three on that date, and that Mr. James Vendire did not come there. I am now on the stand to prove that he did not. Mr. Vendire was in my company from four a. m. until eleven p. m. October 31st. We were shooting partridges in the fields ten miles out of town on the Crawley pike."

"Good Lord!" whispered Devin. "We've been fooled! He's prepared an alibi!"

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"If necessary," continued the witness, "I can prove my statement by fifty persons. Whoever Mr. Hilton Craft and Mr. Paulus Gunn saw, or imagined they saw, during the day of October 31st, it was not Mr. James Vendire. It may have been Yankee Burke, as I gave him a key, telling him to spend the morning in Mr. Vendire's room at the Roxbury, but ordering him to put on Mr. James' coat and to be careful to sit with his back to the bathroom partition, if he heard anybody in the next room.

"To make my story plain, I will go back a little. After the trunk with its dreadful contents was sent to Newport, and I had convinced myself that the prisoner was not the sender, I was at I sent detectives to every possible place that the deceased could have gone that night, but learned nothing. About this time, the Universal Express Company missed a money package, and, ordinary means failing to trace it, concluded it was stolen. They had consulted me about it, and I had recommended some detectives, my little Blinky among them. Blinky was in and out of their offices many times. One night he reported that there was a hot fire in the stove at the Universal's office: as it was Indian summer weather. this was supicious, but with the exception of the smoke there was no evidence that any one was inside - everything locked tight. I sent the lad to the agent's home, but his wife said her husband was out of town, and that she had not seen him for three days.

"The next morning, I had to send an express package, so I took it to the station myself; and as I was not altogether satisfied that the detectives were working at things in the right way, I had a talk with the agent at the Universal's office. I noticed that his hand was tied up with a rag, and asked him how he had hurt it. 'Caught it between two heavy boxes,' he said. One end of the rag was loose; it had a sort of fascination. The man saw me looking at it, and reddened. 'Hello!' said I to myself, 'there's a lie here—why?'

"I undertook to see that hand. I was sympathetic, and anyhow I saw it. It wasn't like an ordinary bruised or mashed hand. The wound was yellowish white, and of a mappy shape; around the edge it was red and inflamed. It must have hurt. 'What is it makes a yellowish place like that?' I asked myself. To the agent, I said, 'It looks bad; you ought to see a doctor.' Mr. Craft said he would, but I knew he wouldn't.

"After I got home, in thinking over the matter, I remembered that at the inquest in New York it had been developed that the attempt had been made to destroy the body by acids, though no trace of acid had been found on the clothing, which was clean and fresh — a fact considered curious by all.

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I therefore employed Blinky to search the premises of the express office thoroughly; first arranging that he should have every help from the officers and from Mr. Wolfe, whose shops adjoined. soon returned, bringing a carboy stopper, a piece of a sulphur candle in a tin box, and some tiny sweepings of sealing-wax — all found in the cellar — and some ashes from the stove in the express office cellar." (All but the ashes were here offered as evidence by the defense). "The ashes disclosed nothing. At the inquest in New York, I found this in the trunk," and Mr. Blount produced a broken bit of a seal. "It has a little beaded edge, and the letters 's-t-o-n' on it. comparison you will see that two of these little crumbs of sealing-wax that Blinky brought me have a section of the same beaded circle that this piece It may have been a coincidence, but to me it seemed more. I told Blinky and Yankee Burke to watch the office day and night.

"On the night of October 29th, Blinky came rushing in to say that Burke had gone home ill, and that he must have somebody with him quick. I went with the boy myself, as it was nearly midnight and no quick help obtainable. He led me to the express office. No lights were visible, but smoke was pouring from the chimney. Everything seemed deserted; the last train had come in for the night and there wasn't even a ticket office open.

"Blinky and Yankee Burke had fixed things conveniently; so when the child led me into Wolfe and Company's shops, I was not surprised to find that they had made good use of their privileges and had a carefully concealed peephole. Both of us looked, and this is what we saw:

"Two men in front of a stove in which was a hot fire, smelling of coal oil; by them a pile of stained clothing. The men talked in low tones. The big man said, 'Unless we get them off the trail quick, we are done for.' And the other replied, 'I declare, it makes me sick as a dog to think that we needn't have killed him after all.' You can imagine what I felt when I heard that admission, gentlemen! Then he went on, 'But ain't you glad I didn't let you send all the clothes with the body? They will clench the matter and save us, for they're bound to arrest somebody, and it had better be him than us; another Vendire valentine is needed badly.'

"They were burning something in the stove; clothes, it looked like when they opened the door and stirred up the flame. All our interest was centered on what they did next, and we forgot about the stove, for they prepared a package—underwear, trousers, flannel shirt—a good compact bundle it was; we saw it addressed and well addressed. This is the way they did it, and the experts will substantiate me: little man wrote 'M,' big man took the pen and wrote 'r,' little man



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's,' big man 'J,' little man 'a,' and so on until the address was completed:

> 'Mrs. James Vendire, 11001 Riverside Drive, New York City.'

"If you will recall Blinky, he will corroborate me.

"On the night of November 1st, I went to New York. I was there when the package arrived. It was opened in the presence of Mrs. James Vendire and detectives summoned for the purpose. It was sent back on Mr. Devin's order. It has been offered in evidence by the prosecution. Blinky and I are willing to swear that it is the same, inside and out, that we saw the two men prepare in the office of the Universal Express Company."

"Who were these men?" asked Mr. Rumsey. And Mr. Blount answered:

"These men are two of the State's witnesses. They tried to decamp the moment Blinky mentioned the fence, but as they have never been out of sight of the police for one minute since October 31st, I think you will find them safe. As far as I can learn at present, their names are Hilton Craft and Paulus Gunn."

CHAPTER VIII

A CHANGE OF FRONT

THE excitement caused by Mr. Blount's disclosures was intense. The courtroom was instantly in a hubbub, and the sheriff rapped vainly for order. Cries of "Mob them!" "Lynch them!" were plainly heard.

Mr. Devin approached the judge, and said a few words which his Honor had to repeat to the clerk, so great was the confusion and noise. That officer, lifting his hand to command silence, announced in triumphant emphasis that the Commonwealth withdrew all charges and moved to dismiss the case.

When Judge Bentham passed on the motion, the crowd vented its enthusiasm in cheers. In vain the sheriff was ordered to clear the room; the audience — now a veritable mob — crowded round the prisoner to touch him, speak to him, to grasp his hand. Mr. Vendire was smiling, a red spot on each cheek. Mr. Devin — who had been among the first to congratulate — said he was glad from the bottom of his heart; that every time he had looked at the prisoner he had become more fully convinced that he had been duped and betrayed

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into taking wrong measures. Blinky appeared from nowhere, dancing a war dance upon the seat of the witness chair itself. The judge adjourned court, but the crowd refused to leave. Then some one started the rumor that the guilty men had escaped, and there was a scattering to track them, with dire threats.

When it was reported on authority that they were safe in jail, the crowd returned to its hero. It followed Mr. James Vendire to the jail, where he went to get his belongings. As he traversed the long corridors, even the prisoners cheered him; the jailer was radiant. During his short imprisonment he had made many friends, and had been treated with greater deference than the jailer himself. Never was an accused man more triumphantly vindicated and cleansed from all stigma.

Mr. Vendire's lawyers came immediately to talk things over with Mr. Blount, but he listened rather moodily to their congratulations.

"We made a narrow escape," said Mr. Blount; "and I am not deserving any praise, as the detection was owing to a lucky accident. Even now there is a lot that is puzzling me. How on earth Craft and Gunn met Horace Vendire, and why they killed him, will have to be developed later. My present theory is that Horace Vendire caught them stealing. Perhaps, when he left the hotel that night, he went to the Union Station, either to meet his brother or to see about a train. Possibly, from

what we overheard, they were unaware of his prominence when they took his life."

"Of course, the next thing was to dispose of

his body," said Mr. Rumsey.

"Yes; that is the knotty question with all murderers. The weather was on their side at the time. If you remember, after the big storm, August 28th, it turned unseasonably cold. They had several days to get their wits; the adjoining factory suggested destroying the body by acids. Nitric was used there in large quantities, and, as everyone knows, it burns, and burns quickly. But it has a peculiar odor and betraying fumes that they could not stand; hence the sulphur candle."

"But where did they get the first suit of clothing? It corresponded exactly with the one the

murdered man wore when he rode away."

"Probably from Mr. James Vendire's room at the Roxbury. He had all his brother's effects. Gunn, being a detective, found this easy, and the clothing was simple — dark trousers, outing shirt — Horace Vendire probably had dozens of each."

"Weren't they fools?"

"I should say so! We were, too. They might have escaped after all, if it hadn't been for Blinky."

"Devin is mortified to death over your unheeded warning."

"Is he? Glad of that. When I heard their plans, I was sure they would not try to involve

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another innocent person, as Mr. James was already under suspicion and being watched by Gunn. They may have started the report themselves, anyhow, they made use of it."

"And then you deliberately planned an alibi —

poor Devin!"

"I thought it the best way. Mr. James had suffered all the odium of the awful accusation; so the fact of his having calmly allowed himself to be arrested and passing a few days in jail has only made his triumph greater."

"And Blinky? What a boy! Where did you

pick him up?"

"Poor waif! First found him by the side of his dead father. He followed me home, and simply wouldn't leave me. I haven't done half as much as I'd like for him, but his gratitude and affection are the brightest things in my life. He'll get a part of the reward, if I have any say."

"I suppose you heard that Miss Frewe added a whole year's income from her inherited estate

to the rewards, the day the trial began?"

"No. Did she? I was away at the time, you know," responded Mr. Blount, letting his chin drop in his hands as his visitors left him.

Craft and Gunn were given a hasty examining trial. Blinky was allowed to testify in full and much other evidence corroborative of Mr. Blount's theory was educed, after which they were

held prisoners without bail, to await the action of the grand jury.

Then came the trial. It was long and searching. The two men were given every chance, but such was the accumulated evidence that the jury needed but one hour to reach a verdict of murder, with the penalty of hanging.

A few days after the conviction, the rewards were put in Blount's hands. Miss Frewe sent a check for three thousand dollars; then Mr. Claws and Mr. James redeemed their pledges.

Mr. Blount demurred:

"There is plenty of time. Life is full of surprises. The rewards can keep until Craft and Gunn pay the penalty."

"But they have been convicted," said Mr. James, and the stipulation, you know, was arrest and conviction."

Mr. Blount had to admit it, and finally consented to accept the money, not so much for himself as for Blinky, who, he declared, was entitled to half and, with the half, a chance that he had long coveted for the child. He gave Yankee Burke a crumb. Then he had himself appointed Blinky's guardian, and bought him clothes that fitted him, and sent him to school.

But Blinky bore these honors meekly, not to say rebelliously; in truth he only consented to accept them on one condition: he must ride to school



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on a brand-new, chainless, cushion-frame, coasterbrake bicycle.

But education did not fit Blinky, although his clothes did, and it would be hard to say which made him more uncomfortable. The boy was miserable, and he really pined so much for his freedom that Mr. Blount had to bring his short school term to a close.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRISONERS

HARDENED sinners as they were, Craft and Gunn did not take kindly to prison life, and to any willing ear they persisted in asserting their innocence of the murder of Horace Vendire.

The case was appealed, and affirmed; an effort was made to get a life sentence, but to no avail. The Governor designated the first Friday in February for the double expiation on the gallows, and for the first time the prisoners seemed to realize that nothing short of a miracle could save them.

One person after another tried to get a confession from them without success. It seemed incredible that sane men should continue to deny their guilt in the face of such evidence against them.

Time was flying. It wanted but a month to the fatal day — then but three weeks. The death watch was set, and two souls were faithfully guarded until they could be handed over to the custody of Eternity.

Mr. Blount, for the sake of right and truth, stayed by the prisoners to urge a full confession; there was too much obscurity in the case. These

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men must not be allowed to die without confessing. Awaiting this, he cheered and helped them with creature, if not with spiritual comforts. But although both had forgotten the part he had played in apprehending them, and clung to him as their only friend, they firmly reiterated their innocence of the murder of Horace Vendire.

Mr. Blount had to have that confession. Failing to obtain it by argument or entreaty, he sought for a weak point in their armor of silence. Gunn was young and unmarried, but Craft had a wife and child of whom it was said he was fond. Mr. Blount believed this when he casually mentioned them and saw Craft shudder. Then he discovered that Mrs. Craft had come, had written, had sent messages by every possible channel, urging her husband to let her be with him till the end, but he had steadily refused to see her for even a single moment.

Craft showed so much feeling on the subject that Mr. Blount was sure that this was the point to be attacked. Probably Mrs. Craft alone could influence the prisoner. With all his eloquence he urged an interview, but was flatly refused.

Then Mr. Blount had recourse to strategy. The prisoners were in separate cells, and he got permission for Mrs. Craft to be allowed to visit Gunn. She stayed some ten minutes, and after she left, Mr. Blount went in to see Craft, mentioned Gunn's visitor, described the cute ways of

the little baby Craft, and envied any father the possession of so fine a son.

Mr. Blount took care that Mrs. Craft and the baby should come to see Gunn for several days in succession, and that her husband should hear of it afterwards. Finally, one day, he left her in Gunn's cell, and went in to Craft's.

"That boy of yours is in 42, Craft, and the little beggar is actually making Gunn laugh with his cute tricks; you just ought to see him."

Craft winced. "Why in hell are they always coming to see Gunn? he cried, angrily. "I reckon I need cheering up as much as he does."

"They haven't gone yet; if you say the word, I can let them in."

Craft grunted a kind of assent, and Mr. Blount lost no time in escorting Mrs. Craft and baby to the cell of the doomed man. Then, not being able to stand the pathetic cry of the woman as she fell into the brawny arms of her mate, he left them alone until the time was up, when, coughing to announce his approach, he took her out to the street himself.

When he returned, he found Craft pacing the narrow floor. "I knew I hadn't oughter see them! They've made me weak as wax. What did you want to persuade me to see 'em for?" He turned angrily upon the lawyer. "I can't stand it. Her heart's broken. She was good, and all I have to leave her and the boy is a disgraced name."

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"Have you nothing at all?"

"Not a red cent. Even the house she lives in will have to go, for it is one of them easy payment things, and it lacks another payment. All my wife will have is the furniture, and, without a home or food, we know where it will soon go. There isn't even enough to give me a decent funeral; the State will have to foot that bill," and Craft groaned. "Good Lord! I can see her grinding and slaving now to keep the boy from starving!"

"You had a good position with a regular salary. What became of all your money?"

"It went in different ways — mostly in speculation. Whenever I heard of an empty pot, it looks like I put my money into it. Great Cæsar's Ghost! Some of the things I've gone into would make a dog laugh." But here Craft remembered he was talking, and closed his mouth with a snap.

The lawyer was at his wits' end, when one day he met Mrs. Craft in the prison corridor. Reflecting that the time was growing very short, he stopped her and inquired kindly after her health. His tone was so sympathetic, that the poor woman heard the true ring, and her eyes streamed.

"It's a nice law," she said, "that will take the life of an innocent man, and that man a father!"

"It is a pretty hard case," admitted Mr. Blount, as if he had had nothing at all to do with it. "If your husband is innocent, he has only to explain that curious package we saw him prepare, and how

the trunk happened to pass through his hands, and we can save him."

But at this suggestion Mrs. Craft only wept the harder, and shook her head so violently that her tears were flung right and left, some of them making damp spots on Mr. Blount's smart, black coat.

"I have tried to make him tell, but he won't,"

she wailed.

"Have you tried to get Mr. Gunn to tell?" asked the lawyer. The poor woman caught at the idea, so Mr. Blount had her admitted to 42 immediately.

He was walking back and forth with the guard, when presently he heard a sudden cry.

"Come quick!" called Gunn. "She's fainted dead away."

Mr. Blount helped to carry her into the waitingroom, and, sending everybody out, gave her his personal attention. As soon as she could speak, he questioned her. He was peremptory. She need not pretend. Gunn had told her about the murder; she must repeat the entire conversation instantly.

But she persisted that she had been told nothing. The air in the jail was very bad. She was far from well — tired out before she came. She had been up since daybreak, trying to earn a little money with laundry work. Gunn was not going to tell her anything. He was too smart.

She came the next day, to see Gunn and to tell



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him how sorry she was to have scared him the day before. She only stayed a minute, then asked to see her husband in 48.

The guards reported that when she went in, she had whispered something to Craft, after which he had scolded her and had been so harsh that she had replied angrily and left him in a huff.

CHAPTER X

MR. BLOUNT SCORES

PAULUS GUNN sat with his head in his hands, thinking of the past and of the future, realizing how short is pleasure, and how long is pain. His pleasures were gone forever; even with the least guilty, pain had intruded, and now it had usurped all other feeling and was an actual, ever present reality. He loathed himself, his life. What was this thing of life, anyway? Thank God, it was not for long! A few days—but he shuddered as he pictured what would happen in a few days.

For the first time since his conviction, the numbness that had chilled his faculties disappeared, and his mind woke to eager reasoning. He could see things never before visible, and his last remnant of manhood revolted.

The jailer brought him his supper — prison fare, coarse, plain, badly cooked, rudely served, but Gunn ate it. He had generally pushed it away, but his appetite seemed to be returning. His spirits also had improved; he chattered with the guard.

- "You must be feeling better to-night," said the man. "Had any news?"
 - "Not the kind you think."
- "I was hoping you'd heard from the Governor."
- "No, I believe that game fell through," and here Gunn's cheerfulness left, as suddenly as it had come. He became agitated, and said hoarsely: "It's an awful thing to have to die for another person's crime!"

The guard lifted his eyebrows. "Heap easier than having to die for one's own, I should think."

- "Wait till you try," growled Gunn.
- "There's mighty few that's innocent, and can't prove it."
- "Did you ever know an innocent man to die —be hanged before?"
- "The guard reflected. "No, I never have; they generally manage to get the benefit of the doubt. There was a man here once Smith of Bowlinggrass who was accused of murdering his wife, and sentenced to be hanged; I always believed that man innocent, though mighty few agreed with me. They tell about him yet; and now that I come to think of it, he had your cell."
 - "And did they hang him?"
 - "Nope; he gave 'em the slip."
 - " How?"
 - "Poison."

Gunn started. "Indeed! How did he get it? It wasn't half a bad way."

"It was awful," replied the man—"heap worse than hanging. Why that poor fellow endured hours of burning agony before he could die, instead of the five minutes, and sometimes less, that hanging takes."

"He didn't have the right poison," said Gunn. "What was it?"

"How'd I know?" answered the man, shortly, and changed the subject.

Gunn lay on his cot. He was restless, and turned from side to side. He kept seeing Smith of Bowlinggrass. By and by, he became quiet, and passed the night without waking.

"It's a blessing when they can sleep like that," said the guard. "That poor dog ain't been much on the sleep, since he's been here."

Towards morning the prisoner breathed heavily and groaned. The guard went into his cell, and shook him kindly. "Wake up, ole fell; you're having a bad dream."

But he did not wake — either then or after. The jail physician came, and the moment he saw him said one word, "Morphine."

No one could say how he had gotten it. Everything was done to revive him, but in vain. Then at ten in the morning, unrepenting and unconfessed, Paulus Gunn committed his last theft: he stole a march on the hangman.

Mrs. Craft was suspected, but nothing could be proved against her, so the authorities had to be content with forbidding her admission to the jail.

When Craft heard of the death of his pal, he raved like a madman, and raved some more, when he heard that, in consequence of the suicide, he was not to see his wife as usual. After this, he lost heart, and brooded. Blount thought it a good chance to make him talk, but it did not prove so. He was as hard as nails. The lawyer was discouraged, but he had not given up.

Ministers of all creeds besieged the condemned man, promising the reward of life eternal that is meted to repentance even at the eleventh hour—pathetic promise in sight of an awful death.

But their pleading received but the one reply: "I'm innocent! 'Fore God, I'm innocent!"

Mr. Blount was now with him nearly all the time, and the big man, although at the height of his popularity, was moody. But one morning, he appeared beaming as the sun after days of cloudiness.

"Craft, I've been thinking about your case day and night" said he. "Realizing how terrible it is for you to leave your flesh and blood dependent on charity, I believe I have hit on the very plan. Of course, it rests with you; but if you choose, you may leave them a nice little sum after all."

Craft looked his surprise. "How can a condemned man make money?"

"I will tell you: I have made no secret of the

fact that I want to get your confession, have I? And I am truly interested in your poor wife and that splendid boy. Don't answer me; wait until you hear me out. I suggest that you write a short history of your life, with a full explanation of these last circumstances, but don't let a breathing soul see it. It must be truthful; you must take your Bible oath that it will be truthful. I'll go to all the papers in town for you, to get bids for the story; you will do as other authors—get the best price you can, and resign all rights to the purchaser. It will be a go—a real scoop for somebody. You'll give them the title beforehand, so that they can take out a copyright, advertise, and all that sort of thing.

Craft listened and pondered, and the more he pondered the more feasible the scheme appeared to him.

Mr. Blount gave him materials, secured him from interruption and set out to bargain with the press. One and all thought it a good scheme, but no one cared to make such an absolute "unsight, unseen" contract. They must know that what they bought would have value; otherwise the criminal might put up any sort of a game on them he chose.

"I can arrange that," said Mr. Blount. "Craft has placed the affair in my hands; the only condition he makes is that no one shall read a line of his manuscript until the breath has left his body.

If either I or Mr. James Vendire had the money, we would outbid all of you, but he hasn't got it, nor have I. We will make Craft take his oath that every word of his confession is true, and if it's any kind of a sell, the contract will not be binding.

Thus presented, it was not a bad scheme. Every paper in town sent in bids; the *Evening Hurrah's* being the highest — two thousand dollars.

Craft entered on his task with enthusiasm. He was hard pressed over his title, which the *Hurrah* had to have without delay. Finally he sent for Mr. Blount and handed him a slip of paper which bore the somewhat contradictory inscription:

"THE TRUTHFUL CONFESSION OF HILTON CRAFT, VICTIM."

CHAPTER XI

JUSTICE SQUARES ACCOUNTS

IT wanted but a week, then six days, then five before the day fixed for the hanging. Craft said he was not near the end; could not they give him more time? To make things plain and true, he had to go back and tell how it all came about.

"You've got plenty of time," said Mr. Blount, "write the last part first, and then go back and fill up; better too much than too little."

The Hurrah spent large sums advertising, "The Truthful Confession of Hilton Craft, Victim, the Murderer of Horace Vendire," to be published the day of the Execution, February 1st. There were posters everywhere — circulars, cards, signs. Advance orders came by mail, by telegraph, by telephone. For a poor man the world would not have cared, but a millionaire!

Three days before Friday! Brain and pen were still hard at work. Crowds besieged the jail, but were prohibited from seeing the prisoner. Mr. Blount ordered it, and the lawyer's orders were generally obeyed. Craft must be left alone; he was doing his last work for his wife and child

— the child who would hate him for his crime, and the wife who would love him in spite of it.

Two days before Friday!

"The Truthful Confession of Hilton Craft, Victim" was finished. The sheets were fastened together, securely wrapped and sealed many times by the prisoner himself, Blount watching.

But Craft hesitated to give it up. He feared it might fall into alien hands; that he would not get the money. Mr. Blount must swear to lock it unopened in a safe somewhere, and bring him a receipt for it. Mr. Blount agreed, took it to the old Bank of Lewiston, saw the clerk lock it in a private drawer of the great vault, got a receipt and a key, and no one was to touch the treasure save he who presented the receipt countersigned by Blount, and the key.

Craft took both key and receipt, and held them day and night.

"It will keep them from starving," he said, with heavy sighs.

His work was done, he sat in idleness, but time, instead of dragging, went swiftly. Reporters were now admitted, and never rested in their efforts to get an inkling of the contents of the famous manuscript. But the doomed man lived up to his contract, and no word of disclosure passed his lips.

Only one more day, and a small part of another! He, on the inside, begged for wife and child. She, on the outside, pleaded for, at least, a farewell, and through Mr. Blount's influence the request was granted. While the mother hung her head in shame, the innocent child flung his pink, fat limbs in freedom, and laughed until he was all dimples. Such a frolic! And he gurgled, and crowed, and became purple with delight. Finally the little fellow grew tired and without speaking, the father took him, and, tucking the nodding head under his brawny arm, put him to sleep.

The man looked at his wife, and the wife looked at him. With her, it was the wild, anguished tumult of parting from the father of her child. With him, it was a pity for himself; for every now and then he passed his great hand over the back of his neck, as if he felt something there.

Suddenly Mr. Blount started, and Craft peered through his grated window. Both heard the sound of hammering. They could see nothing save a bare brick wall, for the jail yard was on the other side.

"What's that noise?" asked Craft.

"Carpenters — building a house," answered his wife quickly, and she grew so hysterical that she wakened the babe, who joined his cries with hers.

"Hammer, hammer, hammer! Mr. Blount went out in a hurry. All the prisoners on the yard side of the house had climbed up in their windows, and were watching with wide, morbid eyes. They were in luck, those west-siders; and judging from the despatch of the workmen and the noise they were making, that must have been a wonderful piece of architecture.

Mr. Blount slipped home for an hour or so, to change his clothes and see what Blinky was doing. He found the child in bed asleep, with the covers drawn in a huddle about his thin face. Blinky was used to sleeping at all hours. Mr. Blount got a bite for himself, and, putting bread and milk by Blinky's side went out, locking the door behind him.

"I wonder why I care so much for that little rascal," said he.

When he returned to the jail, it was night, and the ministers had come for a last appeal to the condemned man; but the hammering whitened their faces and disturbed their prayers. The poor mother hushed her babe, but tried to talk and make noise enough to drown that hammering.

Then it ceased. Once more there was quiet, but a quiet that was awful.

The murderer fidgeted. "Say something, somebody; this waiting is hell!"

Mr. Blount suggested that he try to sleep, and promised that he and Mrs. Craft would stay within call. The big lawyer was unusually nervous, restlessly going in and out, everywhere.

In the street, a flood of crows had swooped down, and were roosting on the tree-branches, tele-

graph poles, housetops, attic windows, until the only bare things were the wires that interlaced around the jail in a network of death.

The policemen cleared the streets, and tried to keep the crowd in check, but it gathered in spite of them. They threatened the crows, and drove them from their perches, only to have to repeat the performance.

Barely two hundred invitations had been issued originally to the sheriff's entertainment; but somehow the number had enlarged, and the two hundred swelled to four hundred, and the four to six, the jail officials turning many honest dollars in the swelling.

Mr. Claws and his colleagues had been offered reserved seats in front, but such tender hearts could not brook so sad a scene. "Enough for us, Mr. Blount, that our president's death will be avenged," said Mr. Claws, who had called to see the condemned and ask whether the confession were finished. "We have given the tickets to the foremen and chief engineers of the American Blade and Trigger Company's Lewiston Branch."

Mr. Blount went back to 48. The hubbub in the street had been heard in the cell; there was a crowd of reporters about the grated door. The lawyer dispersed them, with cutting words, went in and sat by the sleepless Craft. For the first time, he noticed in the heavy features something like fear. Craft had lost the last thing a man

ever loses — hope. Mr. Blount looked at the murderer's clenched hands, which would soon be feebler than the sleeping babe's.

"Ah," thought the lawyer, "could he write his thoughts now, it would make py worth reading!"

The night wore on. Once more the faithful ministers came to implore repentance. The murderer, in his self-absorption, heard them with an absent-minded grunt, and mechanically knelt beside them, repeating the words they desired. He did not feel sorry, nor did his heart respond to his lips; but his wife, hearing the automatically repeated words, ceased her noisy crying, and blessed the men of God for saving the sinner.

Time sped. All through the galloping hours came the noise from the street, growing ever louder. Orestes was never more tortured than this poor soul in his cell; to him was at least given the liberty of the air, but this murderer had to sit inactive between narrow stone walls, listening to the buzzing of the audience assembling to pay tribute to—a star actor—a first-gentleman-in-waiting who was to appear on a stage where no encores were allowed.

At about four in the morning the jailer came to superintend Craft's toilet. He was washed, shaved; willing hands drew on clean, new clothing. As any nobleman, he had his valet, his gentlemen; like a great man, his every word was jotted down, to fly thousands of miles. He ordered a breakfast fit for a king — no more prison fare for him — but when it came, he pushed it away in disgust, for his soul loathed it.

Then a pinkish gray came into the sky, and the jailer whispered something to Mr. Blount, and Mr. Blount whispered to the minister, and Craft, seeing the lip motion, looked at his wife and groaned, "No, no!"

But the poor wife, who had followed each head in its nodding and shaking, divined their meaning, and cried, "You want me to leave him!" And she threw her arms around the thick bull-neck of her husband, as if he had ever been what a husband should be, and nothing could part them.

Even the scribbling reporters turned to look another way, and Mr. Blount — dear sympathetic man — almost hoped she had hidden some deadly drug in spite of them, and would manage to slip it into her husband's hands in this last embrace. But he watched her closely to see that she did not.

Then they held up the babe. The father shivered, kissed, clasped him close — so close that it hurt and the babe cried out.

The mother took the child, and some men took the mother, and almost carried the two downstairs to good women who led her aside and waited with her until she could have her husband again.

Mr. Blount thought how many times she must

have waited for him — many sorrowful, without doubt, but none so sorrowful as this.

The noise in the jail vicinity increased; the crowd poured in with tickets and without. The police did what it could, but the people swarmed and crushed. It was not a clamorous crowd, but the steadily increasing hum was far worse than boisterousness.

When the first red sunbeam shot upward from the east, there was silence, and the tramping of feet could be heard. Through the arched doorway of the side entrance to the jail yard, the head of a procession appeared — reporters, turnkeys, physicians, the sheriff, and his assistants, the friends of the prisoner, and, last of all, Craft himself.

He was pale, but he stepped well, looking vacantly at the gaping faces, as if his eyes were past seeing. Two ministers preceded him, reading selections from the Bible. A third walked at the right hand. At his left was Mr. Blount.

Poor Mr. Blount would have shirked this office, but Craft begged it, and his was too kind a nature to withhold such a crumb of comfort from a man in sight of death.

He was glad Blinky was safe at home. Blount had such a care for the youngster that he had taken the precaution to hide his outer garments, when he had locked him sleeping in his bedchamber, for fear the boy should witness a sight that would be a lifelong shock to one of his tender years. Good, thoughtful Mr. Blount!

Before the noose was adjusted, Craft asked permission to speak.

"My friends," he said, "you have come here to look at a man who hasn't made much of his life, but who has tried, in these last days, to keep his wife and child from starving. I hold in my hand a key and a receipt. Look at them. They are to bring help to my poor wife. You know all about my contract with the newspapers. As I stand here looking at death, I charge you to see that the other side of this contract is carried out, for I have kept mine, as God is my witness!"

The sheriff approached, shook hands with Craft, adjusted the black cap. He was placed over the trap, the noose went over his head. The ministers prayed aloud.

The mechanism clicked. Craft struggled; then Mr. Blount heard a smothered cry — "I am innocent of" — when the trap fell.

Mr. Blount closed his eyes, but, remembering his trust, opened them and bravely looked. One hand was still clenched tight. Mr. Blount kept his eye on that hand. As soon as decent, he must unclasp it and take what it held, in order to keep his compact with the dead.

There was a whisper in his ear: "Mr. Blount,

give me the things quick; we haven't a moment to lose. The manuscript will probably take hours of work."

Mr. Blount nodded, and, taking the dead man's hand, tried to unclasp it. It was locked so tight that the fingers were buried in the flesh.

"Hurry," said the Press. "Force it."

It was forced. The hand unclosed, revealing nothing. Mr. Blount had not seen the things drop; the man had held them up to the people not fifteen minutes before. They must be beneath the trap. It would not do to search now, for in this crowd of blackguards the prize might be purloined, and cause trouble and delay. He whispered his fears.

"We can't wait," said the Press. "They know you at the bank, and will understand. Tell the sheriff to see that no one else gets them."

Mr. Blount obeyed, and, leaving the still quivering body, hurried to the street with the reporter and jumped into a waiting cab.

"No harm done," said the lawyer, as it rattled and dashed with encouraging speed. "I don't see why I didn't notice when he dropped them. I begged him not to take them to the scaffold; but up to the very last, he was afraid of treachery, and he was so dead sure he could hold on to them until I could take them away. 'It will be my last thought on earth,' he said; 'tell her.'"

The two men pulled up before the Ionic columns fronting the old Lewiston Bank, and entered the building.

"What can I do for you?" asked the affable clerk behind the grating.

The trouble was quickly explained. The clerk looked blank.

"But, gentlemen!" he protested.

"You know it's all right; you've got the combination and another key; let me have the papers. Every moment is gold."

"I'm sorry —" began the clerk.

Mr. Blount writhed, all the reportorial instinct of his younger days revived. "If you raise any objections, I'll break into that drawer myself."

"I don't understand it at all," gasped the clerk.

"A good fifteen minutes ago a young reporter rushed in here with the key and the receipt—signed by you, Mr. Blount—and I got the package, and he was off in a jiffy."

But before the last words were uttered, Blount was dragging the reporter back to the cab, and saying:

"Come with me, and we'll do what we can. All we have is our title! Good Lord!" he cried, mopping his brow and looking helplessly at his companion.

"We are lost!" cried the panic-stricken Press.

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"By this time, some dishonest yellow sheet is getting the facts from the confession, and writing an article under another heading; and by noon every paper in the world, except the *Hurrah*, will have the particulars of the killing of Horace Vendire."

CHAPTER XII

A NARROW ESCAPE

I SUPPOSE we have to go to the office and tell them how it happened," said Mr. Blount, sorrowfully, "but what we'll do to the Yellow will be plenty."

"Yes," agrees the Press, pulling himself together, "but nothing to what the *Hurrah* is going to do to me!"

On reaching the building, they found everything in commotion. In the press rooms they could see men working away for dear life; other reporters of course had been detailed to bring in accounts of the execution, and the workmen were rushing these through so as to be free for the long expected confession.

The sight made Mr. Blount wretched. As he followed his companion, he mentally worded a warrant for the arrest of the man who had forged his signature. The two passed into the managing editor's sanctum, the reporter first. Ignoring his employee, the editor addressed himself to the lawyer.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Blount, for sending the key and your order in advance of our slow man there. Those thirty minutes have been solid gold to us. The manuscript is in much better shape than we thought possible; half of it has already gone over the wires to our branches."

The reporter stood gaping, but Mr. Blount was himself immediately.

"My messenger was not very presentable," said he, "but he was reliable — and quick" — he added, "damned quick."

"Sorry, haven't time to talk it over," said the editor in a good-bye tone. "Come round to-morrow."

Mr. Blount went out to the hall, and the reporter followed, smiling, though with mouth awry, for he felt relief from the strain of the bad halfhour just passed.

"Here's a rum go," said he, "but aren't we in luck? Evidently one of our own men found it."

The lawyer looked at him quizzically. "When you discover who it was, come round and tell me."

As Mr. Blount was leaving the building, he saw an odd-looking figure huddled in a corner by the entrance — a curious ball of some curious material of black and white plaid striped in red. From the center of the ball appeared a little weazened face, grinning from ear to ear.

"You owe me one, pard," said Blinky's voice. "Ef it hadn't been for me, you'd a been a goner."

Mr. Blount looked at the boy and laughed. Blinky's costume was simple. It consisted mainly of a mackintosh buttoned not tightly, but securely: the sleeves fell below the hands, and the tails had been artfully pinned up.

"You scamp you! I've a mind to give you a good whaling! Come, tell me all about it."

Blinky needed no urging. "You see, after you locked me up in that onchristian sort of er way, I woke up en got to thinkin', en I was jest pizen shore you'd need me afore you know'd it. So up I get; en ez you'd made way with my cloes en hided my bike, I took what I could find of the reserves, en lit out for the hangin' afoot."

"How could you light out when you were locked in?"

Blinky laughed gleefully. "You can't lock me in no secon' story room in this town, en then trees is trees no matter how small en low they be, en I don't weigh as much as you do yet."

"Go on with your story, you rascal!"

"I got in at the jail dead easy; they all knows I b'long to the force. When they kinder looked cross-eyed at my cloes, I jest says, 'Disguiseded for the needs of the perfesh,' like I've often heard Yank say, en I slipped in 'thout no sorter trouble. I got to the very front; ef you'd er looked round that there platform, you'd er seen me, but you was lookin' over my head all the time. When that pore cove showed the key en the paper, en said how it was all he'd got to leave his family, I kep' my eye on him clost.

"' Jest supposin', 'says I to myself, 'some crook was to swipe them there things? Lordy mercy! Wouldn't them other papers give a heap for 'em?' En I never took my eye off my man's hand.

"Shore 'nuff, when he was first strung up, en everybody thought the sight of him er jerkin' en er kickin' too turrible to bear, en even you snapped your eyes to keep from seein', my man opens en shets his hand, like this, and down falls the key en the paper thu the open trap.

"I makes a dive under, swipes the things, en slips out before you could say Jack Robinson. I knew there warn't no time to lose, en I didn't have no money along to pay a cabby — thet's your fault, pard — so I borrowed a new bicycle thet I seen in the hall of the jail, en the way I made my legs wag was a caution. But whilst I was er skimmin' along, I remembered that even the key wouldn't do no good 'thout the order was signed, 'cause I'd heard you say as much; so, as I knew you'd er done the same for me enny time, I stopped for a minit to write your name for you."

"You forged my name, did you? You'll pay for it!"

In no wise scared or abashed, Blinky responded: "Oh, you won't be ashamed of it. You sent me to school; they taught me to copy writin' in school, so I keep on a copyin' en I've copied your writin' tell you couldn't tell it from yourn. Gimme the key to unlock my duds, en whilst I'm returnin' this

borrered bike, you can step roun' en ask the bank to let you see it."

Mr. Blount meekly obeyed. He gave Blinky the key to his wardrobe, and sought the cashier in the Bank of Lewiston.

At his request the clerk showed him the order. The signature was admirable. Only months of careful practice could have produced such perfection. Verily, Blinky was discovering new talents!

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONFESSION

BLINKY remodeled his toilet, saw what there was to be seen at the jail, returned to his lord, and the two hung round the printing presses of the Hurrah all the forenoon.

Mr. Blount seized the first, flat, folded sheet that the monster machine spewed forth, and, leaving the noisy neighborhood, went out with Blinky to the street. There, in an angle of the great building, without noticing the boy, the big man leaned against the wall and read:

THE TRUTHFUL CONFESSION OF HIL-TON CRAFT, VICTIM.

"I was born in Dewittsburg, in the mining district of Pennsylvania, thirty-two year ago. My real name is Tom Murphy. My father was a conductor on the Pen Point Railroad, and all my life has been passed within sight and sound of the locomotive.

"My life began with accidents, and accidents have followed me ever since. My father was killed in the Merry Valley smash-up, and the news

of his death brought me into the world before I was ready to come. As I am to leave before my time, things are squared. My mother was not what most people would call a good mother, but she would have given her soul for me, and I am not sure that she didn't. She was my mother, and that tells the whole story.

"My earliest recollection is of putting bottles on the rails for the engine to crush, or crossed pins to make tiny scissors; even my pennies used sometimes to go under the big wheels of the black When I was thirteen, another accident devil. happened to me. While playing with some boys on the tracks just outside the town, some one proposed to roll a large rock from the side of the hill on to the track, to see whether the Evening Mail would crush it. There were about a dozen of us, and we worked at the stone, which was a big one, until we loosened it and down it rolled. As luck would have it, there was a sharp curve in the track at this place, with the hill on one side and a steep bank edging a creek on the other.

"The Evening Mail came thundering along — a long train of passenger coaches, baggage, and mail. Bang went the train against our rock; but instead of smashing it, as it had done our bottles and other things, the engine tilted and fell over the bank to the creek, dragging the cars after.

"That was a scene for you! — groans, shrieks, people dying, scalded, burned! All the boys but

me ran away and hid, but I had sense enough to know they wouldn't suspect one boy, so I came rushing up, pretending to have seen the wreck from a distance. It was a time of strikes and riots in the mines, and lots of men were idle. These swarmed round the wreck like bees for honey, and I was with them. It was rich plunder and my first real crime.

"My mother was afraid and hid the things I brought her, but she soon quieted and went back with me herself to see what else could be found. There was plenty. We made several trips. Then by the stream, half in the water, I saw what I thought was a dead body that had been overlooked by the ghouls. I dragged it up on the bank a little, and was feeling in the man's pockets, when he suddenly grabbed me and yelled bloody murder. Without stopping to think, I hit him over the head with a stick, broke loose, and ran home as fast as I could. My mother, following, said I had done for him, but I hadn't. He was afterwards found by the rescue train, and carried with other wounded to Simpkinsville hospital about fifteen miles from our village.

"After the first horror of the accident wore off, search was made for the fiends who had plundered the dead and dying. Many of the passengers were able to remember much that happened, and some of their memories of being robbed by a strong young boy were too good. We thought the place

was getting too hot to hold us, so we decamped, bag and baggage. How we moved from place to place would take more pages than I have days on earth; nothing but theft and flights, anyhow. It came so natural for me to steal that I just couldn't help it, though with my mother to back me I was smart enough never to get caught. And right here let me say one thing: God only knows how wicked I have been, but I always loved first my mother, afterwards my wife and child, and what I done was for them.

"To go back to my story: After we had drifted round for some time, my mother got tired and wanted a home, so she suggested that we change our name, go South where we didn't know anybody, and where I could go to school and learn a trade. We had some money — mother was real savingly inclined — and seeing an advertisement in one of the papers, we tried a little spec'. It turned out so well that I was quite set up; already I could see us two with lots of money, living like some of those railroad kings that travel over the world in their wheel palaces.

"I knew the difference education makes; and though I was a little old for it, the first thing I did with my money was to go to school. I mean we had money enough to live on while I went to the public school.

"I was industrious, and took honors every term; at the end of four years I graduated from the high

school with about as good an education as any boy could need. My professors were interested in me, and advised me to go to some polytechnic institution; but I didn't see that I needed any more education, so I stayed at home, and the first thing I knew I was fool enough to go into another speculation, where I lost all we had. Pretty rough, I can tell you.

"There was nothing to do but go to work, but because of my common school education and a good knowledge of simple bookkeeping, I did not think I'd have to begin at the lowest office-boy positions. My teachers gave me all the recommendations I needed, so it wasn't long before I found a berth in a railway office as assistant ticket seller. I was then about twenty-three years old. My salary was small, but I was diligent, and when promotions were in order I got first place in the ticket office. This was the best part of my life. I really thought in those days that the past had been wiped out, and that I was an honest citizen.

"But unfortunately I had to handle large sums of money, and one day — I don't know what made me do it — I took five dollars. I got scared afterwards, and resigned before anyone suspected me. Then me and mother came to Lewiston. Here, thanks again to my teachers, I got a berth in the Universal. First it was driving a wagon and collecting packages, but I behaved so well and was so quiet and steady that I soon got a better place. I

was promoted several times after, reaching at last the position that I held when I was arrested chief agent at the station express office.

"Mother and I were in easy circumstances, and I was leading a pretty square life. Many a time we congratulated ourselves on our luck, and said how much better it was to be honest and live in peace than to be flying about without home or rest. I might have gone on in this way indefinitely, had not my mother taken pneumonia and died in a week. After she went, it seemed as if I had no one to work for. The office grind tired me to death, home was too lonely, so I got in the habit of going out to have fun with the boys every night. One of these boys was Paulus Gunn, a detective with a good salary and perquisites.

"Gunn and I speculated. Some of the things we handled would have made a dog laugh. Sometimes we made money, when it went like water through a sieve. While my mother was alive, we had lived in a nice cottage, hoping to be able to buy it some day; after she died, I was so lonely that I had about decided to give it up as soon as the lease expired. Life is mighty doleful for a man who has always had a woman around. About that time, however, I met a young woman in our neighborhood who was pretty and of good character, and it didn't take me long to find out that I wanted a wife, and wanted Molly Reay. She

consented, I renewed my lease, she fixed things up, and once more I had a home.

"But ill luck and Gunn came along about this time with a fresh scheme — one of his dead sure things. I was saving to make the first payment on the house, which I had concluded to buy, but Gunn's scheme seemed so promising that I could not resist; I put in all my savings, and anticipated some of my salary. We started up a faro bank, hiring a man to run it and lend it his name. fore we realized anything on our venture, the first note on my house fell due, and I hadn't a red. The new laws against gambling were set in motion in one of those periodic attacks of morality which large cities are subject to. All the hells - ours with the rest — were closed, their layouts seized, and their owners run out of town. As we had not been known in connection with the business. Gunn and I stayed, but the other fellows had to get out.

We were feeling very blue and out of pocket. I began drinking, and I did not seem to be able to save as I used to. Then business scares brought talk of economy, and my salary was cut. The land company that owned my house began to be troublesome. If I did not make the second payment, they threatened to take my property with all I had put on or in it.

"In my office I handled hundreds of packages,

and about that time the banks were shifting a good deal of reserve; many country deposits were being withdrawn from the small centers to be put in large banks. By mistake, one day, I overlooked one of these packages, and it lay on my table after the train left. I started to lock it in the safe, but somehow it found its way to my pocket. Gunn came in soon after, and I forgot it and went off with him. When I remembered it, I laughed and showed it to him, saying that I must go back, as it was burning too large a hole in my pocket.

"I hardly remember how it came about, but Gunn and I opened that package. It contained hundred dollar bills — fifty of them. We were frightened when we realized what we had done, but — my! — didn't they look pretty!

"Then Gunn asked me if I had ever heard of the way some people make eleven one-hundreddollar bills out of ten, and as I never had, he explained:

"'It's as old as the hills,' he said, 'but a mighty good trick. You get ten hundred-dollar bills—they must be old ones just like these, as new money won't do—and you lay them in a row like this.' He had taken ten of the oldest to show me. 'Then you take the upper right-hand corner of one, you tear off a little piece, so—not enough to hurt, you see; that bill will pass as well as it ever did. Now you take the second one and tear off a bigger piece, and you paste the first piece on

the second note. Now you tear off a third corner, from the third note, still larger than the second, and you paste the second corner on the third note; the difference is so little that the strips of paper that you see me joining them with hide it completely.' And so he went on illustrating, and at the end in place of ten we had eleven one-hundred-dollar bills, all of them pieced except two, all of them genuine and, though a little shaky as to numbers, good enough for all practical purposes.

"' What shall we do with the extra hundred?' asked Gunn. 'We can't put it back.'

" And we didn't.

"The plan struck me as about the cleverest I had ever touched, and I wondered where I had been living all these days never to have heard of it before. As we could not try it on a single package without risk, it was necessary to open a great many; but we got very expeditious, and never delayed a package for long, though we were always a train or two behindhand. It required some shenaniging, but we managed famously.

"We did our work at night in the cellar under our office. I blocked up the gratings so that the light wouldn't show above, and locked up everywhere as if I had gone home. My wife fretted over my late hours, she was lonely and thought I was carousing with the boys. When she reads this, she will see that I was working for her. Gunn and I became experts in getting at the money with-

out rumpling wrappers or breaking the seals, and we were so cautious that it worked for four years.

"On the night of September 7th, 1900, Gunn and I were at work in our cellar, when we heard a noise in a corner. I thought it was rats, but I looked up just in time to see my mistake. A man's head was bobbing out of sight behind some barrels. 'We're caught,' I cried, and made a rush for the man. No one man or two men should take Hilton Craft without a fight.

"I have always been quick to act, and I looked around and saw some sacks of feathers, an overflow from the freight office. I grabbed one of these bags and pitched it hard behind the barrels in the corner. Gunn took a hand, and as fast as we could we piled them up. There was no escape. The first one must have knocked the man senseless, for he uttered but the one short cry. We kept piling the feathers until we knew he must be done for; then we put up our work and went off, not daring to speak or look.

"The next day found us both nervous as crows. We had to decide what to do with the body. I don't know why we didn't let it stay where it was; or rather, I do know. I would have had to be the one to discover it most likely, or I would certainly be near when somebody else did, it being on my premises, and I wasn't actor enough to be sure of myself. We couldn't bury it in the cellar, because of the concrete floor. The weather was cold,

so we were safe for a day or two. But in spite of the weather and the fact that the cellar was entirely underground, I knew that the body would soon betray us."

At this point of the narrative Mr. Blount took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face, upon which the perspiration stood in beads.

"Anything wrong, pard? What's up?" asked Blinky, who had never taken his eyes from the lawyer's face.

Mr. Blount gave a prolonged whistle. "Blinky, we don't know who killed Mr. Horace Vendire, after all."

"Oh, pard!" cried Blinky, the picture of woe, "you don't mean to say we has took our money en I've had all that schoolin' for nothin'!"

But not seeming to hear, Mr. Blount went on with his reading.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONFESSION — CONTINUED

T HE next day Gunn came early to my office. 'Have you done anything yet?' said he. 'Nothing,' said I, 'but I'll need your help to-night. They'll be wanting those feathers soon, and we must clear that corner.' He came on time, and we went down into the cellar together. Everything was just as we'd left it; not a soul suspected the secret behind those bags.

"Among other things down there was an old piano box, used last winter up in my office as a coal box. It didn't have anything in it except about a bushel of charcoal that had been left over. I had thought of this box as a temporary hiding-place for the body until the first row and fuss were over, or until we could think of something better. Me and Gunn moved the bags, and there was the man, just as he had crouched behind the barrels to keep off our blows.

"We pulled him out and examined him. There wasn't a bone broken in his body; he was evidently a tramp. He was about the average height, and I should judge about thirty-five years old. His clothes were old, and his shoes worn out. He

had curly, light hair and a rough, sandy beard. He didn't have a red cent to his name.

"It's a common thing to see tramps round the station who have beat their way from somewheres, and I kinder remember of seeing such a figure hanging round the depot a day or two before the killing. He might have crept from a freight and hid in the cellar for the night, when, unfortunately for all three of us, he surprised us in our work.

"When Gunn saw him, he like to have died with disgust. He thought it pretty hard luck, and so did I; for, after all, we could have let the poor devil live. A few dollars would have made him hold his gab, and it would have been a heap easier to get rid of him living than dead.

"We took most of the charcoal out of our piano box, and put our man in. Then we piled charcoal on top of him and closed the top. I found some staples, and made it fast with a good padlock; for the present we were safe.

"I went home then to my wife, who I hadn't seen for two days. She was grumpy and thought I had been off on a big spree, and I let her think so. The first mean feeling I had was when my boy put his little fat hands on my face and patted me; the little rascal actually knew me and was glad I'd come home.

"That day, in my office work, I never forgot what was in the cellar for a minute. The cellar door opened into my office, and I stayed where I

could see it all the time. One or two men had to go down there for something, and my heart

stopped until they came up again.

"Gunn and I had many a discussion in the next two days. As our victim had been nothing but a tramp, no one missed him, so we had nothing to fear on that account. Our crime need never be discovered if we could get rid of the body in some way.

"One night, three days after the killing, Gunn came in, smiling in a relieved sort of a way, to say he believed he had hit it at last. He took me to the freight depot — being a detective, he went everywhere he chose — and he showed me a lot of boxes, each one about twenty inches square, and with a green glass bottle-neck sticking up through a hole in the top.

"'Don't you think we might get one of these into the cellar?' he said. I asked him what for. 'Don't you know what's in them?' 'Some kind of acid,' said I. 'You're right,' said he, 'it's an invoice for Wolfe and Company; they use it in their business, but we need it in ours. If we had a bottle of this stuff, I believe it would be just the ticket.' I couldn't think how; so he explained that he'd been studying over the thing and reading up, and the books said that nitric acid et up everything it touched, and that was what was in those bottles. 'If that is true,' said I, 'it's plain sailing.'

"So we stole a carboy of acid from the freight office. It had two rope handles and was not hard to manage, and I had so much stuff of all kinds to move that nobody noticed me, though I took it in broad daylight. We got it safely in the cellar, and waited, wishing for night to come so that we might begin operations.

"The easiest way seemed to be to lift the bottle and pour acid into the piano box, so we tried it. We had already taken the clothes off, and they were burning in the stove upstairs. As luck would have it, some of the acid spilt on my hand, and before I knew it, I howled. Gunn clapt his hand over my mouth quick, and between us we nearly dropped the bottle. We set it down, and Gunn ran out and got the linseed oil and bandaged my hand the best he could, and though it hurt like fury, I had to grin and bear it. That was the time we lost the stopper. My hand hurt so bad, and the stuff in the carboy smelt so peculiar, that I rammed some papers into the neck and didn't think of looking for the stopper. This was really what caught us. Mr. Blount had sent Yankee Burke and that imp of a boy to prowl round our place on the missing money scent, and they found, between them, first the burnt hand, and then the stopper and the bits of sealing wax that had stuck to the concrete floor. It does seem as if criminals always overlook weak points like that. I lied to Mr. Blount before I thought, and I knew I had

made a slip before the words were out of my mouth. How big a one, I didn't realize till after.

"To go back to the carboy business: In pouring it on my hand and elsewhere it had raised a peculiar smoke that wasn't like anything I had ever smelt before, and both of us realized that the closed up cellar would soon have more than it could hold, if we used enough to do any good. Anything unusual would bring questions and maybe discoveries, so we knew we'd have to give this way up. We carried the carboy back to the depot and put it behind some boxes; Mr. Wolfe will likely find it there yet. We looked inside the coal box and found that, little as we had poured, it had already begun working. It was an awful pity to give it up, but we were afraid of the fumes.

"Then we had to find another way.

"About a week before, I had received a trunk in my office labeled 'To be called for.' I ain't sure yet how it got there. Came back from dinner one day, and found it against a post outside my receiving window. People do all sorts of careless things, so I didn't think anything of it and put it inside with the waiting and unclaimed things.

"For some days, the papers had been full of the Horace Vendire disappearance. The insurance companies needed special detective work and had employed Gunn, and he was soon well informed as to all the ins and outs of that case. He was detailed to shadow Mr. James Vendire from the start. While we were in the cellar thinking over our trouble, Gunn's eye caught the name on this stray trunk.

- "'Look here,' said he, 'how did that thing get here?'
- "The trunk was standing on end; and in a most unusual place, on the bottom, we saw the name of Horace Vendire in stencil letters, rather small.
- "'Why, that's the missing man's trunk!' said I. 'And it has never been called for; he must have sent it himself.'
- "Gunn thought a minute or so, and then he clapped his hands and said:
- "'How'd you like, Hilt, to get rid of our tramp safely and get a big reward for doing it?'
- "Of course, I couldn't tell what he was driving at, so he had to explain.
- "'Mr. Vendire sent that trunk here himself; he's been made way with in some way or 'nother, which is why it has never been inquired for. This is the last place you want it to be found, I can tell you, because it would need investigating, and we don't want any. His brother probably is guilty; I don't see who else can be. What do you say to making him shoulder our crime? If he's a murderer already, it won't matter.'
- "Weren't we fools? It does seem as if each thing we thought of was sillier than the last.

"We opened the trunk. It had lots of nice clothing in it, but Gunn said he didn't like the way it was packed, and the fine clothes were so wrinkled and mussy that either a woman or a fool must have packed it. We took all the clothes out, and said we'd attend to them later; then we had a bang-

up idea.

"We had a regular conjuring scheme. And we were clever, too, while we were about it. We raised a work of art. He was the cleanest millionaire you ever saw before we got through with him, and dressed in the very clothes he had been last seen in, with some letters in his pockets quite We got him into the big trunk; but before we shipped it, we went over every step carefully, to be sure we weren't making mistakes, and we made some alterations.

"For fear any inquiry should be made about the trunk itself - and Gunn said there was sure to be - we couldn't afford under the circumstances to have things belonging to it, or any missing man traced to our office - perhaps as sending his trunk and then departing for fields unknown - so we painted out his name. showed right plain, as being fresh, so we painted the whole concern and in that way got rid of all stamps, labels, and chalks. One of the labels we discovered had the word 'Universale' in a hotel or something, and I knew that the trunk had come by mistake to my office of the Universal Express

because of that foreign ticket, and it made us feel extra safe.

"As I booked hundreds of express packages every week, nothing was easier than to send anything I chose, under any name I chose, to anybody under the sun, and turn in the right expressage to the company, without any questions being asked. From the newspapers we learned all about the Vendire family, their names, faces, and where they lived. Everybody knows what happened.

"Gunn and I had to laugh at the way they identified him; it was right complimentary. His family, friends, and everybody saw some resemblance to the millionaire. The experts had proof to spare; there was even missing teeth to clench the matter. We felt well repaid for our pains, and we did the tramp a good turn after all; it's not every fellow can have such a fuss made over him. I don't suppose his real name will ever be known, yet for months he has set up as a millionaire—and Lord! what a funeral he had! Enough to make every tramp in Christendom turn green with envy.

"We were hugging ourselves and feeling pretty good, when we had our scare about the hand. Both of us knew that Mr. Blount wouldn't ever let that pass without investigation, and, sure enough, Yankee Burke began to be unpleasantly present; we never thought of the boy before the trial, though we had ordered him away from the

premises because we were afraid to have anybody around. We were afraid that we might be connected with the Vendire disappearance, and we were both innocent. They couldn't quite prove the trunk on Mr. James Vendire, so we decided as we had started down that road that there was nothing to do but go boldly ahead.

"We found an old darkey, Tom Springer, and before we were done with him he really believed he'd done what we told him he had, and he was ready to swear to it. Don't do anything to him, for I believe he'll stick to his story and think it's the gospel truth; we told him that he must have been hoodooed if he didn't remember, and we helped his memory by a tableau in the warehouse and a dollar or two dropping from the ceiling. I haven't time to tell all that story.

"We were ready for the trunk part, and the next thing was to clinch matters. We had been ridding ourselves of the things we had found in the trunk by burning; but both of us were afraid we might need some of the things again to direct suspicion from ourselves or fasten it on the real criminal, Mr. James, so we kept some of them back. Then we sent the second package, and we made it just as bad as we could.

"What followed, how we were allowed to testify against Mr. James Vendire, and how we were exposed, everybody knows.

"So you see we told the truth when we pro-

tested our innocence of Horace Vendire's murder, the papers haven't been deceived, and they've got a rattling good story. Mr. Blount has promised to look after my rights, and he will keep his word. I bear him no ill will for the part he played. He's a gentleman if ever there was one, and he's been a good friend all these last days. anything should happen to save my neck on Friday, I know this paper is going to be given back to me, sealed up as I am going to seal it. Mr. Blount has promised it, and he always keeps his word."

This ended the confession. It was accompanied by an affidavit in due form, stating that Hilton Craft had sworn to the truth of the foregoing statements.

After expressing its loathing and horror of the murder as confessed, the Hurrah added a peroration about the tramp, which Mr. Blount rapidly skimmed over; it ended with the question:

"But where is Horace Vendire?"

PART III THE CATCH

CHAPTER I

MORE REWARDS

R. Blount slept so long the morning after the execution that Blinky took his breakfast alone, and afterwards had cat naps before the office fire. At length, sounds from above told him that the big man had had enough sleep, so the loyal subject ventured to ascend for orders. Outside the bedroom door, the look of anxiety changed to a grin, when he heard Mr. Blount whistling.

"Well, Mr. Blodson," was the lawyer's greeting, over a poised razor, "did you sleep as soundly as I? There's nothing like putting a night's sleep between you and your troubles. Sleep, Blinky, healthful sleep, is God's best gift to man. It's about the only thing I know that money can't buy."

"You're way off there," said Blinky, "for money kin buy it."

"Drugs, do you mean? That is not sleep."

"I warn't thinkin' 'bout drugs; what I meant was bikes. Ever' man what bikes by day sleeps by night, en money buys bikes."

"Good! When I have insomnia, I'll take to the wheel; but I haven't got there yet. Just hand me my Sunday coat, Blink, and make yourself smart also, for we are going visiting as soon as I've had breakfast."

The first call was on Mr. James Vendire. Mr. Blount opened the conversation by taking a paper from his pocket.

"Blinky and I have come," said the big man, "to return what no longer belongs to us. You will bear me witness that I was opposed to distributing the rewards until we could get a confession from either Craft or Gunn, but you would have your way, and the others followed suit. There is, however, no harm done; for although Blinky had taken part of his share for necessary repairs, he is able to return the original amount intact, and I gave Mr. Burke only what I usually pay for his service, whether successful or otherwise—"

As he realized the situation, Blinky's jaw fell, and he gripped an imaginary handle-bar. It was an awful jolt, but he was too well-disciplined to speak.

Mr. Vendire pushed aside the proffered check. "You know I can't take that back, Mr. Blount; I only wish it were more. When I think of the days and nights of work, of the journeys, the risk of life, when I think of the free air I breathe through your efforts, I feel that no money can pay you. It is a most inadequate satisfaction, but one upon which I insist."

"But the murderer is still at large, the search must again commence, other rewards must be offered."

"I have already made arrangements with the trustees of my brother's estate for other rewards;

won't you let this end the matter?"

"How can I?" asked the lawyer. "In due time you shall have a bill for legal services at my regular fees, a small amount compared with the sum you offer. Neither Blinky nor I can agree to keep all of this, can we, Blink?"

Blinky was a picture of dejection. He gulped once, but, taking his cue, drew himself together,

saying with brave effort:

"Ef you think me en Mr. Blount would enjoy spendin' money what isn't our'n, you don' know us!" To himself he thought, "The bicycle wouldn't fit him anyways — frame's too low — so I know he won't take thet back."

"Nothing you can say will persuade me to cash this check," replied Mr. James. "See, I drop it in the fire. You are my good friend, are you not, Mr. Blount? If so, you must give me this small privilege. And now we will banish the subject and get to business. Do you believe Craft's confession?"

"Every word of it. He had no object in lying, and every incentive to speak and write the truth. We cannot doubt his horrible story."

Mr. Vendire sighed. "So it finds us as much

at sea as ever, and all these precious months wasted! But the solution is somewhere."

"It is, and I am going to make the police ferret it out if it takes the rest of my life; but really, Mr. Vendire, you must not force me to take—"

"Mr. James did not let him finish. "My loyal friend, are you going to deprive me of the pleasure of feeling that in a small way I have helped you provide for little Blinky?"

Mr. Blount could not resist this appeal, though he replied rather crossly:

"If you are obstinate, I suppose we must yield. Good morning; I'll come round if I hear anything." And giving Blinky a shove, he went out.

In the street, Blinky gave expression to his feelings in a series of handsprings.

"Goody!" he exclaimed. "We've done our hon'rable duty, en he's a brick not to take his money back."

"Shut up, you little rascal! You've precious little idea of honor! You haven't a spark."

Somewhat sobered, Blinky asked humbly where they were going next.

"You'll see when we get there," said the lawyer.
They stopped in front of a sky-scraper, and ring-

They stopped in front of a sky-scraper, and ringing one of a row of bells, called up to ask whether Miss Frewe were at home, and in return were asked to come up. In the elevator Mr. Blount gave Blinky orders that he was not to open his lips once, except to say good morning and good-bye.

Miss Frewe, pale and silent, was waiting to receive them. At the sight of her, Mr. Blount's manner changed from his customary cordial easiness to a somber deference. Blinky gazed at him in perplexity. If the lawyer had ever been embarrassed, he would have thought that such was now the case, for he did not recognize this studied courtesy.

Declining her invitation to be seated, Mr. Blount laid the ready-prepared check before her, saying, "I believe we owe this to you, Miss Frewe, so Blinky and I have taken the earliest opportunity to return it."

"Not so," she replied with her sad smile.

"Mr. James and I had a talk last night, and by this time he has doubtless arranged with the trust company for other sums to be set aside as rewards. That money is not ours; it is yours. We paid it over your protest, and under no circumstances can it ever be taken back."

There was something so final in Diana Frewe's tone that Mr. Blount recognized the uselessness of argument. He replaced the check carefully in his wallet, bowed very low, and withdrew with Blinky.

The child did not dare express his feelings, but followed his leader in well-concealed joy.

The twain next stopped at the new works of the American Blade and Trigger Company. Mr. Blount sent up his card to Mr. Claws, and was invited by that gentleman into his private office.

"I rather expected you round this morning, Mr. Blount," said the new president of the Trust. "Have a seat. Are you in this, too, Blonk—Blodg—"

"Blodson," said Blinky, with a horrible scowl.

Mr. Blount refused the proffered chair.

"Here's your money," said he, crustily. "You remember I begged you to wait, but you followed the others' examples and insisted upon paying on conviction of Craft and Gunn."

"I recall it quite well," said Mr. Claws, taking the paper and scrutinizing it to make sure it was properly dated and signed. "Very just indeed of you, Mr. Blount; I've always heard that you are the soul of honor. Of course, it is still at your disposal if you ever discover the criminal — and — Mr. Blount — I have something on my mind that I suppose ought to have been mentioned long ago, but I have the greatest repugnance to involving needlessly any acquaintance in legal investigations. Has it ever been suggested to the police that, as our poor president was last seen on that fatal night with his bicycle, perhaps he went out to Mr. Alexander's, where he was visiting at the time?"

"That was their first line of investigation," answered Blount. "They have examined every inch of the ground. To be sure, they were not called in till late, but I went out once or twice with them myself; their search was thorough. If Horace

Vendire had met with an accident, either in going or coming from there, they would have found some evidence of it long ago."

"Of course — naturally. Did Mr. Alexander ever tell you where he last saw him?"

"As I understand, at the director's meeting in this very room, wasn't it? Afterwards, late in the night of August 28th, Alexander rode out to his home. You remember we had a storm; he was caught in it, waited under a shed until it was over, and went the rest of the way on foot. If Horace Vendire rode out there, either before or after the storm, the two men would have met."

- "Just so," said Mr. Claws, twisting his cigar.
- "But they didn't," said the lawyer.
- "Didn't they? Who says so?"
- "Alexander himself."

"Of course, we cannot doubt his word, but certain things are not plain to me. Far be it from me to suggest that he really had anything to do with our president's disappearance; but if Charles Alexander claims that in here at the directors' meeting was the last time he ever saw Horace Vendire, he has a short memory. Something occurred that night between the two, after they left this office, according to Alexander himself. Two days afterwards, in this very room, he made a scene: he accused our absent president of an action that we refused to credit; said he had words with him after the meeting, was greatly excited, and ended by

losing all self-control and threatening us violently. Then came the suspicions of calamity, accident, or what you will, and he suddenly let the matter drop absolutely. Is it possible he has never told you of his encountering Horace Vendire after our meeting adjourned?"

"On the contrary, he told us distinctly that he never saw Horace Vendire after the meeting in this room. What is your reason for not mentioning it before?" and Blount looked Mr. Claws so squarely in the face that that gentleman dropped his eyes.

"We could not believe there was anything criminal," he said, recovering in a second, "and after your discoveries, we were so overwhelmed at the mere thought of our having connected two disconnected accidents — er — you understand — that we made amends by every means in our power. In short, we stood up like little men and acknowledged that we had been wrong. Even now, we don't believe that he personally had anything to do with the disappearance. But this is true: he made a certain charge in this room that he expected us to believe. Why has he dropped that charge?"

"I'll find out," said Mr. Blount, reaching for his hat. "Come, Blinky, we must be going. Good day, Mr. Claws."

Mr. Blount went out, drawing in his lips and knocking his fists together. Blinky had to skip to keep up with his stride. Blount paid no more visits that morning; instead, he went back to the office and began to write.

Blinky lounged around, not understanding this sudden change of humor. Then he went to the pantry for bread and molasses, but had barely begun to eat when he heard his name called.

"Here," said the lawyer, giving the boy an envelope, "take this to Jack's and tell him to have one thousand struck off and posted by to-morrow night."

Blinky took the note and started off briskly. When he turned the corner, his curiosity got the better of him, and, the envelope being unsealed, he abstracted the contents and read:

\$6000 REWARD!!!

"We, the undersigned, will pay the above reward to any person, or persons, furnishing information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Horace Vendire, who disappeared on the night of August 28th, 1900."

(Here followed a full description of the missing man.)

"Signed:

"THEODORE BLOUNT,
"HODGKISS BLODSON."

"Whew!" cried Blinky, disgustedly. "I'll be dinged! Th'owin' away good money like thet!"

CHAPTER II

BLINKY SETS OUT FOR HIMSELF

TWO days after this, Mr. Blount took a drive, without asking the pleasure of Blinky's society or informing him of his destination. However, there were certain signs that the boy recognized, so, after meditatively watching him out of sight, he himself made preparations for a long jaunt. He rummaged the larder and filled his pockets, he borrowed a gun from Mr. Blount's extensive collection of firearms — Blinky knew all about guns — put some cartridges in his pockets, and set forth. Taking a Lee Street car, he rode to the end of the track, where he alighted and walked leisurely out the road leading to the old Alexander place.

He had not gone far before he was overtaken by a half-starved horse drawing a lumbering, ramshackle vehicle, in which, he recognized Mr. and Mrs. Fred Poppy.

"Good mawnin'," he sang out blithely, "any snakes out your way?"

He had to spring aside with agility to avoid the cut of the long whip in Poppy's hands, while in the bride's cat-like eyes shone such hatred that Blinky made a dive into the bushes to avoid the evil glance.

When they were at a safe distance, he trudged on again. "I'm meetin' all my friends to-day," he said, as a phaeton drawn by a neat little bay horse came towards him. "Ef here ain't Miz Alexander and thet sweet Miss Di'na!" Blinky stood out in the very middle of the road, so that the phaeton must perforce stop.

"Mawnin', ladies," he said, with a sweeping hat-in-hand bow, as if he were Blount and Blount's size. "I warn't hardly expectin' to meet you, to-

day."

"Nor we, you," replied Mrs. Alexander, affably. "What brings you to this part of the country without your precious bicycle?"

"I own to bein' a little off my base," said the boy; "but I picked up a nail yesterday and em laid up for repairs at the shop. But wheel or no wheel, me en Mr. Blount is jest alike in one thing; we git so tired of town air that ever' now and then we have to stretch our legs in the country."

The voice and manner were so Blountish that the two ladies with difficulty kept their faces from betraying amusement.

"How is business?" asked Mrs. Alexander.

"Putty dull, put-ty dull," answered the boy, and then he told them about the poster; but Mrs. Alexander, not liking the trend of the conversation, changed the subject. "How does it happen you have a holiday today?"

"I kinder thought I needed the fresh air; and as my partner went off on business of his own, I come up here huntin' on the hills. Which one was yours? That'n? How many acres?"

"About seventy."

"You sold it to Mr. Clark, didn't yer? I hope he give you a good price. Do you reckon there's

any birds in your old woods?"

"Hardly, this time of the year. Don't go there with your gun, Blinky; I hate to have the birds frightened—" Then Constance paused. I forgot it is no longer mine; I really know nothing about the hunting, Blinky, as I have not seen the place since we gave Mr. Clark full possession, last autumn."

Here the horse grew impatient and the ladies drove away, the boy watching them out of sight.

"Those is awful nice ladies; en jest don't Miss Di'na look sweet en white with all thet black? She reely thinks we oughter keep her money. It's a bloomin' shame! Hope ter goodness the boss won't know I come up here — that is, till I get my s'prise geared up — ef anybody's goin' to git thet money, I don't see no reason why I shouldn't be the body." Then a smile of delight stretched his lips. "En jest wouldn't I like to git the whole pile en make him take half!"

After this pleasing soliloquy, Blinky mended his

pace, walking briskly until he reached the gates of Hillside, where he stood for a few minutes looking through the bars.

Blinky reflected a little on the time lost since the disappearance of Mr. Vendire, and then continued "Now, 'sposen', thet his sotto voce remarks. very night when Mr. James found out thet Mr. Horace ain't never come back the nex' mornin'. he'd er spoke to me instead of to thet measly perleece? Ef he'd er said, 'Blinky, my brother is disappeared en hasn't never come back, I wish't you'd find out why?' what a chanst it would er gave us!" Here Blinky sighed pathetically. "I'd er tole my pard, en he'd er sent me en Yank out - on the quiet - en you kin bet your saddles we'd er found out somethin'. Instead - look at Two men dead, two men murdered —" Blinky put his hand to his forehead,

"I wonder ef he is murdered," he said aloud.

"Here, youngster, what are you trying to do?" asked a voice.

Blinky turned sharply, with a jump, and confronted a horse's nose. Behind the horse was a buggy, and in the buggy sat Mr. Blount. Blinky had a novel sensation: he was surprised.

- "I'm out huntin'," he managed to stammer, looking at his gun.
 - "Hunting what?"
 - "Birds or anything."
 - "Mostly anything. Open those gates, and get

in here with me; I've something to say to you."

Blinky lost no time in obeying both commands. As they were driving up the road to the cottage, Mr. Blount asked:

- "Did you meet those ladies, and did they stop you?"
- "Yes, sir," answered Blinky, as if on the witness stand.
 - "What were they doing up here?"
 - "I didn't ask 'em."
- "Of course you didn't, but couldn't you find out without asking?"
- "I didn't see any use in knowin'," answered the child, incautiously.
- "You didn't! And you pretend to be a detective! Don't you know by this time, you rascal, that it is your business to know everything, whether you think it will be of use or not?"
- "But ladies, pard! Reel sho' nuff ladies! Ef I has to watch them, I'll have a tool-bag full."
- "Let me catch you watching those ladies; but taking whatever comes in your way is another thing. On general principles, if, in the course of your hunting excursions, you meet anybody—ladies or not—always learn what you can about them. You can never tell what you are going to hear until you hear it—isn't that plain?"

Blinky felt little; nobody but Mr. Blount could make him feel so. He wished with all his heart he had learned more about his two friends. Then came a consoling thought, and he brightened up as he said mysteriously:

"Maybe you think I ain't much of a detective,

but you just wait."

Mr. Blount glanced at him. The child was gazing ahead unwinkingly, with a countenance devoid of expression. "What a face for the trade!" thought the man; then he asked, "Have you been working on that case?"

"Mus' I tell you, pard?" pleaded the boy.

"Everything; you know you will get into trouble if you do not."

Blinky knew. "I wanted to s'prise you," he said, regretfully.

"Well, s'prise me now."

"It's a pity, for I haven't got fur on the way

yet," said Blinky, heaving a deep sigh.

By this time they had arrived at the porch of the little cottage. Blount fastened his horse, and sat down on the front steps.

"Well, are you going to tell me or not?"

"I em," said Blinky, standing before him and fumbling in his pocket. He handed out the soiled and crumpled handbill he had shown Diana Frewe.

"What are you giving me this for?"

"Look on th' other side."

Blount did so. In Blinky's well-known hand he saw the figures:

"Well," said Mr. Blount, "I'm waiting to hear the meaning of all this nonsense."

"Pard," said the boy, squinting one eye, "has you ever thought of huntin' for the bicycle that Mr. Horace rode on the night he went away?"

"Blinky Blodson, what do you take me for?"

- "Of course, you have, but like as not you never found it."
 - "Like as not."
- "Now it strikes me that a bike is a pretty hard thing to make way with most as hard as a stiff."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Blount.

Blinky lifted his eyebrows in hypocritical inquiry.

"You see," continued Blount, "there are lots of ways of disposing of a bicycle; there's nothing the matter with the river, is there?"

"Nothing," answered Blinky, with alacrity; "did you have it dragged?"

"They dragged for the body; whatever the river had floating or lying at the bottom they examined, and there wasn't the first thing like a bicycle."

Blinky thought a little, then said humbly, "What else might a body do with a bike?"

"They might"—here Blount realized afresh how indestructible a bicycle is—"they might melt it up; any furnace would do the business. Of course, there would be something left, and the de-

tectives have been looking for relics of that sort ever since they took this case."

"Me, too," said Blinky. "There ain't no

pieces, so't now I am lookin' for it whole."

Mr. Blount threw back his head in laughter. "Is that your surprise, Blink? You are not as smart as I thought. I suppose those mystic figures form the number; you may tell me how you got them."

"Jest this er way: I was thinkin' 'bout the case when I was sleepin' en when I was wakin', en turnin' it upside down an downside up — "

"That is nothing to brag of; it's your trade."

"I know it, en I ain't er braggin', but the night of the hangin', after we read that Craft's dead man warn't Mr. Vendire, I couldn't sleep for sorrer en thinkin'."

"Skip that."

"Of a suddin I thought 'bout the clerk tellin' 'bout his goin' off fer a ride, August 28th at 11 p. m., en I says, ef he was ridin' when somethin' happened to him, what went with the wheel?"

"Natural question," said Blount, encouragingly.

"Of course, the first thing in huntin' is to know what you are huntin' for. I went to Mr. Alexander's office, for I knowed they's often rode together, and I asked him: 'How much do a first class bike cost now-a-days?' En he says one like his'n costs seventy-five dollars. Then I says, what kine is his'n, en he says it's a Climber. 'Is thet the

best kine?' says I. 'It's jest this er way, Blinky,' says he: 'whatever kine you rides yourself, you want ever'body to ride that kine, en you don't think no other can hole a candle to it.' En it's true, pard, they don't."

"I have remarked that fact," said Blount.

"Then, knowin' thet you like Mr. Alexander, and thet he's helped you all erlong, I tole him why I wanted to know. 'Ah, Blinky,' says he, 'ef you can find out thet, you'll find a lot what mighty many people's been lookin' for. Thet machine's been pounded to bits long afore this. However,' he went on to say, 'ef it ain't, I can give you a pointer: Mr. Vendire en me both rode Climbers. He got his'n two weeks before I did, en we got em d'rect from the factory, ever' bike has her own pertikler number, en the factory keeps the numbers: en ef you want to, I can give you the d'rection en somewhere near the date it was bought, en you can find out jest what number Mr. Vendire's machine was."

"And that is how you got the figures that are to work such wonders?"

"Well, I didn't think they was miracles en things, but I thought it worth a try."

"Of course, if we found a Climber bearing that number it would be a ten-strike, but how in the name of thunder are you going to find it? We've been advertising for stray wheels, but only as one chance in a thousand." "We couldn't look at all the bikes in the world," said Blinky, "But I figgers it jest this er way: it won't do no harm to look at all the wheels I git a chanst at, en I'm doin' it."

Mr. Blount took out a penknife, and opened a small blade. "Do you see this file, lad? A few touches of it would obliterate any number ever stamped on a wheel."

"Would it?" asked the boy, dejectedly.

"It would, so you haven't the scoop you thought you had. You will have to look around for another trail; for if Horace Vendire's bicycle was not destroyed, whoever has it or disposed of it never left the number on it in this world."

Blinky pulled at his ear and looked mournful. "Thet's kinder discouragin'," he finally remarked.

- "Of course, I do not say," continued Blount, "that you are not to take the bicycle into the case at all, but I look for it to cut mighty little figure in it mighty little. If a person were to be found riding a Climber with the number scratched off, it would be suspicious, but not evidence."
- "I see it all. It's one of them tires that seem tight when you look at 'em, but when you go to puttin' your weight on, it collapses."

"Remember the cane," suggested Blount.

"Jest exactly. Since we're on the spot, pard, would you mind showin' me the place where thet Poppy man en his ole girl found that cane?"

"Not a bit; come along."

The two left the porch and walked across the fields; then they climbed down the rude stones on the side of the cliff. It was steep in some places, and high even for the active lad; one had to use care to keep from falling.

When they reached the middle terrace, a rough but level space stretched out before them; large rocks made rapid progress impossible.

"Why do you s'pose them Poppys lied so about this?" asked Blinky, surveying the masses of stone.

"From general cussedness," answered the lawyer. "They bore a grudge against Mr. Alexander; they had been doing all they could to annoy him, and his guests fell under the ban. They are still at it."

"It looked to me when I read the witnessin', thet in some way or 'nother they'd have liked to fix it on Miss Di'na."

"What makes you think that?" asked Mr. Blount, turning one corner of his eye on the boy.

"Well, what they spied out against her would er gave her a motive for the crime, and you taught me first to suspeck any parties ez would have the most motives, such bein' mostly any benefittees."

"That's where you are wrong. She really had no motive. According to the Poppys themselves, the money was to have been hers anyhow, and she knew it. She would have gotten much more money as his wife, and she knew that. And she loved that splendid-looking lover of hers,"

"But see here, ef them Poppys tole the truth, she didn't — she jest natch'ly despised him — felt kinder creepy when he was roun', and all thet sort of business."

"But those Poppys didn't tell the truth; they lied about the cane, they lied about the noise in the bushes, they lied about Miss Frewe and Mr. Vendire running away; their testimony doesn't amount to a puff of wind."

Here Mr. Blount stopped and tapped a large stone with his stick. "This," said he, "is the place where the lovers sat when they heard the snakes in the grass; it is probably the spot where the snakes really found the cane. They took it either to annoy him or because they wanted the handsome piece of carving."

"Are you shore the cane was lost two nights before he disappeared?"

"Miss Frewe says so, Mr. Alexander says so, Mrs. Alexander says so. The two Poppys are the only ones who say not, and I don't believe them. I'm now going to show you the cabin where they claim they found the cane."

It was a hard road; Blinky and his companion with difficulty made their way through the dried bush and detaining thorns, and some parts were not only steep, but wet and slippery.

"It would take more'n my love for Poppy to bring me here long summer nights," said Blinky. "My! but ain't it lonely!"

"Not much of a lovers walk," answered Mr. Blount, "but we are almost at the end." And panting with the climb, the two stopped at a point where, not far above them, they could see the outline of a little log-cabin, and a few minutes more brought them to its door.

"Le's go inside to blow a little en get outer the draff," said the thoughtful Blinky, to whose pale face the unwonted exertion had brought not the faintest flush.

The one room was bare of furniture, with the exception of a beer barrel, upon which the detective took a seat. Blinky scraped together a seat for himself on a pile of dead leaves in the middle of the floor.

"I wish we had thought of bringing a lunch," said Mr. Blount; "the climb has given me a healthy appetite."

"I brought somethin'; ef I'd er known you was comin', I wouldn't et any of it so soon; here's all I've got left."

Hungry as he was, Mr. Blount could not be prevailed upon to partake of the dainties offered to him. Blinky, however, did not need pressing, and he was in full enjoyment of his food when something flashed over Mr. Blount and a pistol shot rang out on the frosty air. Without a moment's hesitation the boy grabbed his gun and thrust the muzzle through the little square window, causing a voice to cry hastily:

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I was only firing to scare you. What are you doing in there, anyway? Can't you read those signs?"

"I can read en shoot, both," answered the boy,

with glowing eyes.

"It's that little devil of a Blinky. Come out of there this instant, or I'll blow the hide clean off you!"

Here Mr. Blount stepped to the door, revolver in hand. "Hold hard, Mr. Poppy; we don't wish any shooting to-day, but if necessary we are prepared."

As his burly form showed itself, with Blinky peering round the crook of his elbow, a female voice cried:

"Law, Mr. Blount, this can't be you! You must excuse us, but we took you for tramps; you know how strict the law is about trespassing. We just wanted to give somebody a little scare."

"Is your husband always so quick on the trigger,

may I ask, madam?"

The manner was not conciliating.

"He! He! Now, Mr. Blount, don't go poking fun at us. It is a joke though, ain't it? Think of our trying to scare a big lawyer like you."

"We didn't intend any harm," added Poppy, pacifically. "I turned up the gun and sent the

ball too high to hurt, see?"

And there was no denying that the ball was imbedded in the rafters of the old roof.

"Do you always go armed?" asked Mr. Blount.

"Law, yes," answered Mrs. Poppy, at the same time that her husband was saying emphatically, "Of course not!"

"I need not have asked," responded Blount, looking at a bulge in the cloth jacket that Mrs. Poppy was wearing.

"How quick you are, to be sure!" said the lady, boldly disclosing a shiny pistol. "You see, Mr. Blount, this place is so wild that Mr. Poppy is afraid to let me walk out alone unless I have my gun, so I am never without it."

"Except in town," amended her husband.

"Of course not, of course not," said Blount, sardonically.

"You are the last person we expected to see," said the bride.

"I believe you," said Mr. Blount. "We were driving in these parts, and stopped to see the land. Good deal of labyrinth you have here, Mrs. Poppy."

"Ain't it? We have become so attached to the place that we hate to give it up."

"Are you planning to move?"

"If we can get our price; it's too much capital for poor folks to have lying idle; we can't afford a summer residence in the country yet a while.

Won't you come up to the house and have something?"

"Thank you, not to-day; we are due in town. Come, Blinky."

Blinky copied Mr. Blount's courteous lifting of the hat, and the two began the descent of the hill. Halfway down, they heard voices, and stopped to listen: the shrill, scolding woman and the rude, profane man were having it out with each other.

"A fine couple, truly," said the lawyer. "I think they're punished enough by fate, Blink, without our setting the law on them."

"They'd er heap better go poppin' their ole guns at each other then goin' roun' shootin' innercent boys en men! Now I jest wonder why they didn't want anybody in that tumble-down shanty?"

They continued their climb in silence, until they repassed the flat stone where they supposed the cane to have been left, when Blinky said:

"Can't I go up to that little grape-arbor yonder?"

"It is not a grape-arbor but a summer-house; we will both go over, as the view is something fine," answered Mr. Blount, desirous of cultivating in his ward a love for the beautiful in nature.

"Jimminy!" cried Blinky, when they stood in the little rustic structure overhanging the cliff. "We can most see to Kingdom Come!"

The description was crude but expressive, for the hills in the horizon, although at least sixty miles

distant, stretched out clearly in an undulating line of pale blue. Between this line and Hillside, town and country alternated in the fertile valley below; other and nearer hills showed plainly in the winter landscape, in masses of purple and brown, varied by velvety black spots of cloud shadows.

Even the callous Blinky was impressed. For about ten seconds he gazed in silence, then he was ready to go.

In passing out, Mr. Blount caught his coat on a protruding splinter, tearing a large snag from the cloth. He ruefully eyed the rent. "Sewing for Maunsey," said Blinky, cheerfully, but in saying the words, he looked at the offending snag, upon which there was another thing. "You ain't the only one who has suffered, pard," he said, pointing.

In an instant Mr. Blount had a small piece of goods in his hand. "It is fine," he said, as if thinking aloud, "it has fancy stitches, so it belonged to a woman; and here is a dark spot—who knows?"

He put it carefully into a capacious wallet.

" Is it something?" asked the child.

"If it is, it is your find, Blinky. I'll take charge of it for the present. Of course, it is only a chance, but it may prove what you and Yank have long sought — a clue."

CHAPTER III

BLINKY FOLLOWS HIS CLUE

THE next morning, Blinky, with an unnatural raw-shininess of face, presented himself at the Alexander's door, asking for the ladies. After the first greetings were exchanged, he stood shiftingly, in a foreign embarrassment.

Diana tried to put him at his ease. "And how is Mr. Blount?" she asked. "Has he had reports of any discoveries in the case?"

- "Not he," said Blinky, recovering himself in a moment, "en I tell my pard it's his own fault. He ain't got a idea to his mine. He's let us detectives do nothin' lately but rust in a corner. All our bearin's need soakin' in coal oil; it's the creakin'est machine I ever rode. Ef he'd get a bicycle, he'd know some things more than he knows now."
- "Would he? I can think of but one piece of knowledge that a bicycle might supply, and that is how to ride one."
- "Thet's because you've never rode," rejoined Blinky, with a superior air. "A bicycle can teach a feller ever'thing."
 - "What, for instance?" asked Diana, interested.

"To begin with, a feller what rides has to go straight. Ain't it good for a feller to have to keep straight in this world?"

Both the ladies were forced to admit that it was.

- "Then," pursued the logician, "a feller must be ready on the jump to clap on his brake."
- "And what is the good of that?" asked Constance.
- "The good! It jest keeps him from going straight to H-pidition! Does a feller want to go to pidition? When a man finds his pace is gittin' too fast for him, ef he hasn't got a brake he's a goner. It's just a chanst whether he'll smash himself up, or some other man, or both."
- "Still, in spite of knowing how to put on a brake, both literally and figuratively, one sometimes hears of accidents," remarked Diana.

Blinky drew his forehead in many wrinkles. "Some men is such fools as to think they's smarter than any other feller; they do things they was never perdicted to do."

- "What kind of things?" asked Constance.
- "Why they take off their brakes, leaves their mud-guards at home — though thet ain't so bad when you're wearin' ole cloes — I have even known fellers thet thought their tool-bags was too heavy to carry; none of em weigh more'n a poun' en a half."
 - "And what happened to them?" asked Diana.

"Nothin', only they was li'ble to pull up a hundred mile from home, with a busted tire en not a button to their names."

"I do not understand exactly what you mean, but it sounds awfully short-sighted," said Constance.

"Short-sighted? It's batty. What I started out to say is this: I never heard of a accident that couldn't er been helped if there had been a brake en a tool-bag. En these things opens your eyes, off the machine as well as on. I've often tole Mr. Blount—en he is rememb'rin' it now, I can tell you—a feller what rides a bike, even if he's a fool, has a pull over a feller what walks."

"And how much greater one, a smart man on a wheel?" said Constance, enthusiastically.

Blinky beamed. "Jes' so. You see me? I ain't very ole, but I knows some things for my age, en I got most of 'em whilst I was ridin'. It's jest wonnerful. I ain't never seen a single good thing in this life thet a bicycle couldn't give a pattern to go by."

"Really I think I must get a wheel," said Constance. "Won't Mr. Alexander be pleased!"

"Mr. Alexander," said Blinky with a note of admiration, "he's a rider from way back! How many bicycles does he run, anyhow?"

"Only one at present; when we were in the country, he kept two — one for town and one for country use."

"My sakes! Two bicycles! When one had to

go to the shop, he had another ready."

"Not only that, but when it rained and he had to drive out from town, he had a wheel waiting in the country for the good roads the next morning."

"Thet was fine; did Mr. Horace Vendire have

two?"

Constance raised a warning finger. "Don't let's talk of him, Blinky — wheel off."

"Excuse me, ma'am; I'll choose another path

'fore I puncture my tire."

"What is your errand this morning? Have you come to persuade us to ride wheels, or simply for a friendly visit?"

"Natch'ly I'd like to persuade you to ride wheels, 'cause I think it 'ud be the makin' of both of you, en when I gets a chanst I always preaches from my fav'rite tex'. But thet ain't exactly why I come — though of course," he added quickly, "I'm frien'ly, too."

Both of the ladies were sure of that.

"What I did come for is to ask a favior," and the boy's embarrassment seemed to return.

"Don't be afraid," said Diana, encouragingly.

"If you wish any help, I shall be glad to do what I can."

"Thank you," said Blinky, with about as near a twinge of conscience as he had ever felt. "It's about myself, ma'am."

"You need my help to accomplish something?"

"Yes'm; thet's it. I want to accomplish a edgycashun."

"What!" exclaimed Constance. "This is

something new."

- "You see, ma'am, when we got our money, I was youngish en er little of a fool. I didn't even own a wheel of my own; had to borrer surreptitious."
 - "But you tried school," demurred Diana.
- "Yes'm, Mr. Blount sent me to school, en he lost er heap er help by doin' it, but dang their cranks! excuse me, ma'am, it makes me wobble jest to think of them."

"Their methods didn't suit you?"

- "They jest didn't. It was too high a frame to suit my short legs, en it was reach, reach, reach, 'thout ever techin' pedals. I was miz'rable, but now—"
- "You realize the change education can make in a man's career?" finished Diana.
- "Yes, thet's the ticket," assented Blinky, soberly. "Now we has offered our money back, en I can't try it again, en I don' exactly say I wants it; but do you remember how, when I gave up schoolin', you was sorry and seemed to think I had lost a chanst? I ain't ever forgot how you offered to let me come for an hour ever' day so't you could teach me somethin'; en I was thet big er sucker that instead er coastin' for the chanst,

I could only remember that bloomin' school; so I thanked you en said I'd think erbout it, en I never did."

- "And now you are sorry, and wish me to repeat my offer?"
 - "Ef it won't tire you too much?"
 - "What do you say, Constance?"
- "I really cannot see where the harm would be, and it might divert you."
- "We could try three times a week at first. Would you like that, Blinky?"
- "Would I? Try me en see. But ef it's jest the same to you, we won't tell Mr. Blount yet awhile, en s'prize him — Gee! won't he be pleased!"

So it was settled. Charles frowned when he heard of the plan, but Diana was too enthusiastic to be thwarted. It would occupy her, keep her thoughts from her own troubles.

Blinky dropped in every morning about ten o'clock, with a great show of books, but if he had been up all night and his head was "muddly," or if he breathed in a little, short, catchy way he had — the young scamp! — the task was suspended, and teacher and pupil talked, or else the boy helped with any household jobs. In the last he showed remarkable efficiency, and in addition to being useful he was always original and amusing, so that on the days when he failed to come both the ladies really missed him.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOLDNESS OF GEORGE

ALL this time, Alexander and Company, though they had managed to keep their heads above water, had not prospered. Events had so conspired to draw Charles to other issues that the main responsibilities of the business had fallen upon George Trezevant.

The shops were not running either full time or capacity, for the low prices made contracts undesirable. It was only by manufacturing novelties that commanded fancy prices that the works could be run at any profit, and here Charles's choice of machinery did good service. His English machines, such as few shops in the country could boast, turned out the most delicate articles. But orders for novelties being only occasional, George had to set his wits to work.

The result was a smart thing, that tided over an evil hour and had other results never planned. He knew to a penny the cost of the production of trade staples; and as the Trust had put the prices of these down below cost, it was ruinous to manufacture them. He resolved to fight them with their own goods. He made a flying trip to Cin-

cinnati, to arrange with a broker for the purchase of Trust goods at wholesale prices with a cash discount, his name to be withheld in the transaction. The Trust would bear the cost of manufacture, and Alexander and Company could fill their orders at a small profit.

The only trouble was the cash.

When Mr. James had been vindicated, and Diana was well, and Charles was able once more to give his undivided time to the company, the two partners pushed the scheme for all it was worth: for both knew that as soon as the Trust caught on to the game it would be stopped, and with their system of spies, this day could not be far off. George and Charles resolved to make a departure and invade the adjacent new territory, buying goods in different centers for their trade. In a short time they had salesmen in each section, buying, selling, and shipping goods from the manufacturing centers of the three Trusts. The plan worked better than they had anticipated, for the three Trusts began to accuse one another of cutting prices and invading territory, the American Blade and Trigger Company being the scapegoat.

George heard rumors of dissension. If the three Trusts got to fighting among themselves, would it benefit Alexander and Company?

The answer was doubtful. The Trusts had cash — practically unlimited — cash laid aside for the wiping out of competitors before entering on

a golden beyond. If they did fight among themselves, Alexander and Company might be further away from trading than ever, being too small an enemy to count when Titans went to battle. this war of giants should last for a time, long enough to exhaust the independent company's small resources, Alexander's would be wiped off the face of the earth. On the other hand, they might come to an agreement with one another at any moment. in which case Alexander and Company would be the chief obstacle to phenomenal profits, for by this time all but one or two of the large firms had either been absorbed or had disappeared under the crushing process. George believed that, if they could hold out, it would be the end; they could name their own price, and it would have to be a stiff one. "The question is," said he, "can we raise the money to hold out?"

"I have secured Constance in case of my death," said Charles, "though I have had to borrow from her to pay the rate; and I am going to keep up that insurance, if I have to starve to death and go in rags—I'm pretty near the last now. She is continually urging me to take her little fortune; I would hate to do so, but if we did we might hold out long enough, and when I come to make my price, all she has advanced shall be added with interest. Advise me, George, would you do it?"

[&]quot;How can I advise you? It seems the best

course, but so many things are always happening that are not down on the books."

On the heels of this conversation came a request from Constance for George to come to her, and the interview won him to her point of view. She gave up every available penny she had in the world.

Charles was pale as he concluded the transfer, but to brush aside depression, said, lightly: "It is win or die now, and to show that I'm in earnest I am going to make the supreme masculine sacrifice—that of giving up tobacco in all forms."

"I thought you had stopped smoking long ago," said George.

"Not quite; I am trying stogies, but I hate to have smoking time come. Hear me register a vow: I am not going to smoke until I can smoke the cigars I like, and I won't buy a single one of these until I am able to pay Constance all she has ever put in this fight."

"Rash man!" said Constance. "I am always afraid of your vows, and some friend may give you some fine cigars."

"My vow is made," said Charles.

Constance kept George to their simple dinner that day, and Diana came in, her presence making him speechless with happiness, for since Horace Vendire's death, he had only been permitted to bow to her from a distance. She was looking lovely — more poetically fragile than ever, with

an added meaning to her expressive features, caused by the past year's experiences. Many little affectations had been brushed away, and the true spirit of the woman had been born.

But Diana was young, she had found her self-imposed solitude and mourning dull; so when Constance urged her to come in ("George is only one of the family, don't you know?") she broke her rule of seclusion and did not take her dinner alone in her little sitting-room, as had been her custom on the rare occasions when Constance had visitors. Afterwards, when Constance made a housewife's excuse to leave the two alone, Diana was not at all displeased.

As she sat near him, chatting of ordinary subjects, George's eye absently fell on her left hand. She instantly covered it with the right, but not before he perceived that she no longer wore her engagement ring.

Reading his thought, Diana's pale cheek burned. "You think it strange that I do not wear my

ring," she asserted, simply.

"It is impertinent of me to think anything about it, as it is none of my business."

"The stone was so large, so conspicuous. Every one looked at it."

Then somehow George remembered a conversation with Constance in which she had quoted: "Be bold, be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold;" and before he knew he dared, he was hold-

ing the dear, ringless hand in his, and feeling the thrill that the trembling contact gave him, when — that unfortunate Charles lifted the portière that divided the rooms, without their dreaming he was near, and Diana snatched away her hand.

To make matters worse, Charles behaved like a fool. He dropped the portière as suddenly as he had lifted it, and although Diana, recovering herself immediately, insisted on calling him in, he declined gutterally, and rushed to Constance, full of contrition.

Diana looked her displeasure at George, the innocent cause.

He was on the point of telling her how inexcusable his action was, how sorry he was to have subjected her to such embarrassment, when he again bethought him in time of his mentor, and said:

"I know this is no time to speak, but I must say what I have longed to tell you for three years."

"Hush," she said. "I cannot listen. I am bound — more bound than a "— she was going to say wife —" than a widow not to permit it."

"No such thing! You are not bound, and you shall listen!" At last George had found himself. "I love you, I love you! Be my wife you must and shall."

And Diana blushed beautifully, causing him to say with rapture:

"You do care for me!"

She stopped him by a gesture. "After a while

you shall have your answer, and — if I do not change my mind — you may hope. At present, you must wait and be silent. Any other course is indecent — shocking. If you insist, I shall be forced to dismiss you forever."

"Dictate your terms, and I will obey for the sake of the blessed hope they hold out."

Then she said: "Until the fate of Horace Vendire is disclosed, I have resolved never to marry. I cannot talk explicitly even to you of this, but it is conscience. I reproach myself, and I could not be happy if I married while he lies — murdered perhaps — in some unknown spot."

She was in earnest. With almost womanly intuition, Trezevant understood her determination and its causes. He thought reverently of her sensitiveness, and knew that he must uphold her.

"If you will let me, I will help you. We will take the matter up from now in a sensible, practical way, and see whether we can accomplish what the law cannot."

Diana felt this offer deeply — so deeply that she formed a sudden determination. "I accept your assistance," said she, "as a first step towards the accomplishment of our purpose, I will give you a supreme proof of my confidence. What would you say, Mr. Trezevant, were I to tell you that during all the months they have been searching for the murderer, I have been in possession of facts that

might materially aid that search, but have withheld them?"

"You will have to explain," he said, dreading he knew not what. Then Diana with faltering and some tears told him what she had told Charles.

Controlling himself, George listened in silence. He did not allow his face to betray either his suffering or his thought, but said, when she had finished:

"And you knew it would drag you into court, and that the publicity would be dreadful for you and for us."

Diana's eyes blazed. "Do you think so meanly of me! Before he went away, I bargained with Horace Vendire to save Constance and Charles—not only once, but twice. Had he lived, your fight with his company would long since have ended through me—though you would never have known that. Then, that night, I was called upon to do the same thing, and still through all these months I have had to keep silent. Charles is innocent and I would go before a thousand courts to save him, but the opposite has been required—far harder than any publicity. Think what deduction would be drawn from my account of that last meeting."

George could only see one deduction — one that he could not give words to, for he knew the world.

"I had that interview with Horace Vendire,"

she went on; "he left me and started back to town. The storm came. He had to seek shelter somewhere on the road. At the other end of the road Charles had done the same thing. He, doubtless, as did Charles, started again as soon as the downpour ceased; who would not say that the two men, on the same road, coming from opposite directions, must have met? I thought so myself for days and days, and I was afraid to speak for fear of involving him. If Charles is put on the witness stand and publishes his discovery of that awful night, tells of his angry note, what will the law infer took place when the two men met on a lonely road in the dead of night?"

"You say they did not meet?"

"They did not. Charles says so, and I would take his word in the face of anything; wouldn't you?"

CHAPTER V.

THE INQUISITION

WITH such varied emotions, there was little sleep for George that night. He told himself that he was happy, that he ought to exult, that the future held golden hopes; they had money for the business, they would get their price from the Trust, they would solve the Vendire mystery, and then — and then Diana would be his wife. But underneath ran a feeling of blankness at what he had learned.

Had Diana, by her confession, lost in his eyes? No! No! Not that! Yet he had an impression — he could not account for it — but when she had confided in him, after that first preposterous and dreadful thought, had come the conviction that while she had the right she had purposely refrained from telling him all the facts of the interview. As far as it went, it was true, but there were gaps and discrepancies. In the long hours of wakefulness he revolved many things in his mind. He saw as clearly as Diana that the gravest suspicions must be fastened on Charles if that last interview were generally known; but he saw what Diana evidently did not see, that if

Charles could prove that he did not meet Vendire on the road to his place, Diana herself must then remain the center of suspicion. He decided to talk with Charles the first thing in the morning.

Thus, without preamble, he seized an opportunity to say: "Diana will marry me as soon as the Vendire mystery is cleared. She told me of her last interview with him; she thought she had to. It changes the point of view decidedly."

"She told you of that, did she? I own I had some queer thoughts when I heard it. Even yet I have never dared ask her to be explicit; I do not wish to know certain things, in case I should have to tell. It only shows what detectives are worth. Not one has ever suspected her."

"I hope not. Have you any private opinion? Suppose you had met him that night on the road to Hillside?"

"If he had crossed my path that night, I should have formed a pretty sure theory."

" What?"

"That he fell by the hand of Charles Alexander. I think he knew that, and saw me somewhere, and hid till I passed. In the state I was that night, I could never have met him without telling him more than I had written, and, knowing the man, we must have come to blows. I would have thrashed him or have been thrashed. My, but I'm glad we didn't meet!"

George was as convinced of Charles' innocence

as Diana, but he was uneasy about several things. Later in the day, he called upon Mr. Blount, telling him that he had come to offer his services in the Vendire case; that there was much depending upon it, and he wished to push matters to a finish of some kind.

"Is his company again pressing you to cover?" asked Mr. Blount.

"What do you know about that?"

"I know that Horace Vendire and the rest of the American Blade and Trigger Company have gone to some lengths to get your firm out of their way; that Vendire's disappearance was a case of frying pan and fire, as Mr. Claws is as able, and has the advantage of a free heart and a few years."

Why was Mr. Blount telling him this?

He replied frankly: "It is true; Claws is worse than Vendire, and I have no good wishes for either. I am not pretending to be sorry for Horace Vendire's fate, but for the sake of my future happiness I must find his murderer — for I'm convinced he was murdered — and see him hanged."

"Better leave the matter alone," said Mr. Blount.

"Mr. James, I hear, is again offering rewards, watching, working. Poor man! Does he suspect anybody now?"

Mr. Blount laughed, "Go ask him."

"I forgot you take, but you don't give."

"You wrong me there," said Mr. Blount, sadly. "My heart is entirely too soft," he continued, laying a large hand on the section of black cloth supposed to cover that organ. "Some day my sympathies are going to make me turn traitor; I'll defend a criminal, and then farewell to my career as the friend of the innocent."

"You have many a day of service yet."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Blount, very seriously; then, as if taking a sudden resolve, "Maybe you will think I am not justified in telling you something, but you must promise to hold the confession inviolable."

George promised, wondering what was to come.

"It is about this case. Suspicion points to certain parties. I try to shut my eyes, but the links seem to forge themselves; the chain is all but complete. This is my confession: My sympathy is heart and soul with the guilty parties, for I think they had justification. I believe I have only to stretch out my hand to touch at least one of the accomplices, and I won't do it."

As he spoke, Mr. Blount stretched out his hand dramatically, and Trezevant, losing all control of himself, cried:

"For God's sake, Mr. Blount, tell me what you know!"

For a few seconds, Mr. Blount looked puzzled, then his face cleared, and he laid his hand tenderly on Trezevant's shoulder. "I see you know," he

said, in a voice of low gentleness; "probably you know more than I, but do not tell me, for I do not wish to hear."

"You misunderstand me," cried the younger man. "I came here to find out, hoping that you had not learned certain facts that might be construed in more ways than one. I am afraid you know those facts; I tell you, you are wrong, and what's more I'll prove it."

Mr. Blount shook his head. "I have told you I am on her side, and that I will do nothing. Don't stir the matter up; I have shut my eyes to further proofs, and I won't open them."

"You've got to; it has gone too far now. That man doesn't live who can be allowed to think her—what you think her—and I not try to prove him wrong."

"Consider what you are attempting. If you go to work to publish this thing, you bring endless trouble to many people. As far as I am concerned, the matter may stay quiet indefinitely. Without me there is little suspicion — really none — only conjecture unsupported. I repeat that from me you have nothing to fear."

George glared at him. "What I say, I mean. Do you think I could marry her now, and not let her know that you have accused her to me? If I let her know, would she marry me until she proved herself innocent? Why, she won't even consent to marry until the world knows what has become of Horace Vendire. She has made that a condition."

- "Has she?" cried Mr. Blount, admiringly. "Clear her, and I will say you are the smartest man that ever lived."
- "Where is your proof?" George demanded, wildly. "A girl has an interview at a rather unconventional hour with her lover, who, though she doesn't know it, is a black scoundrel." The lawyer's face did not move, though he listened attentively. "I say she was forced to have a midnight interview with her affianced husband. Was there anything wrong in that? He had deceived her all along. She had thought him noble; he turned out to be a villain."
- "Yes, he deceived her, and he was a villain." said Mr. Blount, half to himself.
 - "She hears his errand, and she leaves him."
 - "Begging your pardon, she goes with him."
- "Goes where? She promised to go with him before she discovered his villainy. Then, when he in some way finds out that she has learned what he really is, he takes himself off secretly—and something that I wish to find out, and that I will find out, happens to him."
 - "She went with him."
- "How on earth can you make such an assertion? She promised to go with him and marry him the next day, but that was before she dis-

covered his true character. She stayed with Constance and would see nobody."

- "But after or before she made her discoveries, she went with him to a little summer-house on the cliff."
 - "Summer-house?"
 - "In the dead of night?"
 - "And what of that?"
 - "Far out of sight and sound of the house."
 - "Again I say, if she did, what of it?"
- "She hates him, or at least she fears him, he has made a will in her favor yet she goes with him."
 - "You are a fiend!"
 - "No," interposed Blount, "a friend."
- "You are her friend, and yet you believe she would commit a crime?"
- "I know human nature. The chance came, the temptation was strong. That summer-house—"
- "You insist on the summer-house. She did not mention it; I know she did not go there."
- "I can prove that she did, if you will have patience."
- "And supposing she did, what of it? Even though you prove it conclusively, what else does it prove?"
- "I can guess pretty accurately, though it is only a guess and I have nothing to prove this part. Whatever she did, she did alone. Afterwards she had to have help; there was more than she

could attend to unaided. Who that help was, I know."

"Who was it? Remember, I am not believing but questioning."

"Her more than brother, Charles Alexander. Coming out, towards morning, he found her in need of assistance. He had no choice; he did the best he could for her; I think—"

George laughed horribly. "All this is absurd. What did they do with him — with the body?"

"There never was a better place for disposing of a body. First, shovels and other garden tools were convenient in the summer-house. Yankee Burke saw them, three weeks later; then, close at hand was a freshly ploughed field."

George laughed again. "You think one of the garden tools was her weapon? You cannot know her. She is far from stout now, but she was much weaker then — fragile, delicate as a piece of porcelain. Why, man, I doubt whether she could lift one of those shovels you mention."

- "Did I say she used one of the shovels?"
- "You meant me to infer it."
- "I doubt whether she touched one of them; they came in use afterwards."
 - "What nonsense!"
 - "Have you ever been to that summer-house?"
 - "Many and many a time."
 - "Then you know its situation?"

- "Perfectly; it is built on the edge of the cliff, for the view."
- "Built of branches of cedar, forming a rustic, circular place octagonal, I should say."

"Granted, what then?"

- "You have observed the railing?"
- "Certainly, two rustic pieces laid horizontally."
- "Have you noticed that one of the top pieces on the cliff side is loose?"
 - "I have not."
 - "Then go look at it; it is dangerously so."
 - "Do you mean to say —"
- "I mean to say this: She met him there alone. He angered her in some way insulted her perhaps. He swore to ruin her best friends; she is loyal to her friends." Mr. Blount sighed. "He had worried her, had excited her abhorrence; she was frantic. He leaned against the railing. It was slight, low not more than a foot and a half high. A shove he lost his balance and was over a precipice of seventy feet at least, in one of the wildest spots that nature has ever planned."

The young man was on the verge of lunacy. "An accident maybe — you lie!"

"Don't say that," said Mr. Blount, evenly. "Though I will forgive and forget it, for you are tortured to death. If it was an accident, why didn't they tell of it? Nothing would have been simpler. I wonder they did not claim it, anyhow. They did not tell, so it was no accident."

"Have you finished?" asked George.

"Mr. Alexander then appeared on the scene, and they fixed up a plan together. The lady went back to the house; the storm had alarmed her, so she sought her friend Constance. The gentleman waited until he could attend to some little matters. He came in later, covered with mud from his head to his heels. Mud is a mighty good covering sometimes."

"You are a monster! You can see nothing but crime. Innocence has no existence for you."

"Unfortunately, it is rare," replied Mr. Blount, and the sadness of his tone was pathetic, "but, thank God, it exists!"

George hardly heard; he was mentally summing up Blount's hypotheses. "Not one of your proofs is conclusive; you will have to find the body first."

"If the detectives had been called in earlier, they would have had it before now. They were summoned late, and had barely struck the right trail before the Craft discovery threw them off."

"Late or early, if the body is there, it can be found."

"I do not agree with you. Think of all that ground to go over — down in the ravine — rocks upon rocks, one precipice above another, the whole covered with a wild growth that a human being can hardly penetrate."

"Still, in a case such as this it is possible, Mr. Blount, to search even those wilds."

"And even if we did, and found nothing, there is still the field. Where would you dig in that?"

"If you believe your own story, you will waste no time looking for him in a five-acre field. Any man—and Horace Vendire was a large man would have been a load indeed for one person to carry up seventy feet of steep incline."

"And then," said Mr. Blount, ignoring the last remark and speaking as if to himself, "I do not wish to find it."

"Why not? You've got to find it! I shall insist. This alone will prove your claim!"

"So I tell myself, and as long as it remains unfound I can not call myself a criminal."

"What is your meaning now?"

"Just this: If they find that body, my duty leaves me no choice; I must either go before the grand jury, or I am a criminal myself. I could not expose her! That girl, in prison?"

George groaned. "Prison! Diana Frewe! Pure, tender thing! Why she's a lily — a beautiful lily!"

"And she is not exactly what one might call a criminal, morally. She did not intend to do it; the temptation took her by surprise. We know the man was a villain; we can guess her provocation."

"Villain or no villain, she had no hand in his death."

Mr. Blount went on: "Whatever others may

discover, I shall never accuse her before the world, but the moment they find that body, thus proving my theory, my career is ended; I practice no more law."

George's mind was ringing with the lawyer's disclosures. "How do you know she went to that summer-house?" he reiterated. "She did not mention going, and she told me about the interview."

- "Did she mention other things? Did she tell you that from the night of August 28th she was a changed woman? Did she tell you of the days that followed?—of her guarded composure before me?—of her raving in delirium when the trunk was sent to Newport?"
 - "There was no need to mention all this."
- "Why was her friend so eager to sell the place that had always been his delight? He negotiated the sale the very next day August 29th."
- "Your memory is poor, Mr. Blount; you your-self have referred to our financial straits."
 - "That gave a happy pretext."
 - "It was a most urgent reason."
- "So he told his wife. Her heart is set on buying the place back. Poor woman, she little knows the secret it holds — she at least is innocence in person — but the other two would rather die than live there again, and if possible will never go back."
 - "You grow childish."

"There are many things," continued the lawyer, that she hasn't told. Did she mention hurting herself when she pushed against the railing?"

"Prove it, I dare you! Oh, you are killing me!"

Mr. Blount went to a small table, upon which was his microscope in position. He opened a box, and selected a lens. "Have you ever studied physiology?" he asked.

"A little, yes."

"Will you look at this?"

The young man obeyed. He was trembling, but he adjusted the lens and, looking, saw some round discs.

"Blood corpuscles," said he, briefly.

"Now look at this," said Mr. Blount, taking a piece of muslin from his pocketbook. "See, it has some fancy stitches in it—embroidery—I think they call that design a fleur-de-lis. Ask Constance Alexander—adroitly, mind you—Ask her from what sort of a garment that was torn; and if Miss Frewe wore it, whether she got hurt. Pray be careful, though. Then come tell me what she says, and you shall hear when and how I obtained this piece of goods."

"I can hardly wait to prove how far astray you are, and will go this instant."

And George went out, with Blount's eyes meditatively following.

CHAPTER VI

PROOFS

TO obtain what he wished without exciting suspicion would require delicate management and Trezevant realized the difficulties of his errand. The first requisite was to see Constance alone, and, this accomplished, he must make the interview seem casual.

He formed a half-plan for action, the execution of which was made easy when he perceived Diana's little phaeton standing in front of the apartment house. He stepped into a neighboring store, and waited until a slender figure, robed in black and heavily veiled, came from the building alone and entered the vehicle. Then he sent up his card.

He found Constance seated at a desk, writing.

- "I trust I am not disturbing you," he said, drawing up a chair to her side. "Rather an informal hour for a visit, but I was passing and couldn't resist."
- "You know I am always glad to see you. What a pity you did not come ten minutes earlier! Diana has just gone for her drive."
 - "Has she has Miss Frewe told you?"
 - "She has; that is, she has told me that there

is nothing to tell; all the same I think you made her very happy last evening."

"Thank you for thinking so; that is now my one object in life — to make her happy." George spoke gravely and earnestly. He was no detective, and he hated his mission and this sparring for time.

Constance caught the anxious tone, and said sympathetically:

"Isn't it provoking that the Vendire case should hang on as it does? Truly, 'the evil that men do lives after them.'"

"Yes, Horace Vendire controls us even after death."

"Why cannot he be found and be put away once for all, as any ordinary man?"

"Yes, why?" echoed Trezevant, his thoughts divided.

"I suppose it is because he was not an ordinary man; I have never refused to see his power. Diana is a monomaniac on the subject of duty. She has changed — her whole character has been changed by this thing. I think she owes precious little to Horace Vendire."

It was necessary to hasten; George had a happy thought. "She has some awfully strained notions. Look at the way she secludes herself—though from my point of view I cannot object to the seclusion now that she makes one exception. It has given me my long-sought opportunity."

"Which, thanks to my teaching, I am proud to

say you have not failed to improve," chimed Constance.

"I hope I haven't. I say, speaking selfishly, I don't object to the seclusion; what I do mind is the heavy black, those ugly veils and things. All of us men detest mourning; I positively feel that black every time I see Diana; it seems to change her whole character."

"Not only seems, but does; one is more affected by color than one is aware; black is most depressing."

"And she is such a dream in white," said George, enthusiastically. "I always think of Diana in white. She had a white dress last summer—a thin sort of stuff with fleurs-de-lis—do you call them?—worked over it. She was adorable—to be sure, she is always that—but this was so becoming to her white skin and light hair."

Constance burst into silvery laughter. "What a joke! That sounds poetic and lover-like, but Diana never wore a frock with the fleurs-de-lis."

"She didn't!" ejaculated George, with countenance beaming.

"You are thinking what a dream I was; I had a frock worked in fleurs-de-lis."

"You!" exclaimed Trezevant, in astonishment. "I think you must be wrong."

"How can I be wrong? Could I think I had a frock I never had?"

- "No, of course not; I must have gotten things mixed, white is all so much alike."
- "But think of your remembering even to the pattern! Now Diana had a kimono but I know you never saw her in that, for she is not in the habit of seeing her adorers in negligée. Imagine the particular Diana being guilty of such a thing!"
- "And this kimono was it worked in fleurs-de-lis?"
- "Yes, it was from the same piece as my frock; we both bought the goods for summer wrappers, but I liked it so much better after it came home that I thought it far too pretty for one, and made myself an afternoon frock with my own hands."
- "Then the joke is on me. Are you quite sure of what you say?"
- "Would mistake be possible? What will you give me not to tell?"
- "Wait till I am convinced, and then I will offer a bribe; show me the things and prove what you assert."
- "What fun! You will let me expose you to Diana?"
 - "Unless you condescend to accept the bribe."
- "We will consider that later. You wish to see the frock?"
- "And the kimono; nothing short of both will convince me."

Constance absented herself, while Trezevant

paced the floor in agitation. After some delay, she returned with but one garment.

"Here is the frock, George, but Diana must have given the kimono away — I suppose on account of the association, for I remember the last time I ever saw her wear it was on the very night that Horace Vendire is supposed to have been murdered."

Something clutched George by the throat, making him speechless.

"She is so sensitive," pursued Constance, that I suppose she could never bear the sight of it afterwards."

With a heart of lead, Trezevant forced himself to say, carelessly: "So she wore it that night, the night she was hurt in the storm?"

"She told you about that, did she? I had forgotten it myself. It may have been another reason for discarding the gown; the sleeve was torn where she hurt her arm closing the shutter."

"Yes," responded George, eagerly, "closing the shutter." Then he added: "It is awfully pretty—this goods—give me a piece for a souvenir?"

"If that isn't sentiment far fetched! I suppose I must humor a Knight of Romance — here — where the plaits join the belt is a lot turned in — will that do? Give me the scissors from the basket on the table."

Trezevant obeyed, and soon had a piece of the material. He looked at her clock. "How time

flies with you! Charles will wonder. As a man of business, I must not linger. Au revoir."

"Au revoir. Are you coming to-night?"

"Perhaps; do you think I may?"

"May, can, and must."

"I accept your decision, and you must take the consequences."

"I will. Adieu, Sir Knight; as you have not offered a bribe, I am free to tell on you." And the last thing Trezevant heard as he closed the outside door was her merry laughter.

CHAPTER VII

CORROBORATION

T REZEVANT went at once to Mr. Blount's office to have everything made clear.

"I have come to hear your side of the story," he began, without preamble, "Why did you tell me all that this morning?"

Mr. Blount looked long and earnestly into Trezevant's eyes. "For right's sake," he answered. "Which would have been better—to have told, or kept silent?"

"I suppose it was kinder to tell," admitted George.

"And what opinion would you have of any one who would let a young fellow at the start of life marry a girl of whom he believed the thing I believe?"

"That is just the point; I have no claim of friendship, and she has."

"She has no claim that you have not, and I have compromised her in no way by what I have told you; she could not be in safer hands, and I knew that when I told you. Mr. Trezevant, it was the one little thing I could do to ease my conscience.

I have seen much in my life — wrong and sin and shame. I have made mistakes, but I have always tried to do my duty. I am suffering now in the conflict between duty and conscience. Who am I that I should hold death so lightly? Before I am through with it, this case is going to force me from the bar."

"If, feeling under no obligation to her, your duty is so plain, why do you shirk it?" asked George, bitterly.

"Because some of my truest friends are involved. In denouncing her, I must play into the hands of the Trust that is trying to ruin your firm; in denouncing her, I would have to implicate Charles Alexander, take his time, his money, and — God forbid it! — his life. He was forced to help her. He had no choice. A nobler man never lived."

"He is a man of grit, and might stand even your accusations," said George, sarcastically.

"Anything that hurts him will hurt his wife. Think of Mrs. Alexander, born to wealth, luxury; remember how she has endured for his sake. I cannot! For their sakes, I must spare Diana Frewe; for your sakes, that you may have nothing with which to reproach me, and in order that, if I am wrong, love will find it out, I have told you what I have. Answer frankly: are you sorry?"

"I suppose it might be considered kind in some ways," George admitted.

"You say you do not intend to marry her with this charge overhanging?"

"She says she will not marry me until she has discovered what has become of Horace Vendire."

"Then, as far as I can see, you view the matter as I would have you. And there is another consideration; I have confided my motives. What will you do if you adopt my conclusions?"

"I never consider the impossible."

"But I know. You will do just as I am doing now — say nothing to the world and let her go scot-free."

"No! No! However, I will not even think of so preposterous a thing."

"What did you find out about the cambric?" asked Blount.

"I have a sample; pray God it may not be the same; not that it affects my opinion, but, if it matches, yours will be strengthened."

He took out the white scrap and gave it to Blount, who put his own by the side of it. They were identical! Mr. Blount's was discolored by the weather and that other stain, but it was of the same goods, with the same embroidery.

"We'll take the glass, to be certain," said the lawyer.

It bore that test also.

"Now," said George, "I admit that she has a garment made from that material, but you cannot

prove that she tore it in that summer-house on the night of August 28th, or even that she was in there with Horace Vendire."

- "Why can't I?"
- "Because Constance was with her during the storm, and she says that she hurt her arm closing the shutter."
- "Did Mrs. Alexander see her hurt her arm closing the shutter?"
- "I don't know that she saw her, but she says it happened that way."
 - "Whose word has she for that?"
 - "I do not know."
- "Another question: if Miss Frewe did not mention hurting her arm in or out of the summerhouse, if she did not tell you that she went there, must she not have some reason for silence?"
- "Ye es; but you cannot prove she was in the summer-house."
- "One more question, and I will prove it. You have established the fact that Miss Frewe wore that dress the night of August 28th; that she injured her arm in some way, because she was seen with blood on the sleeve of the fleur-de-lis dress; has she ever worn that garment since?"
 - "Never; Mrs. Alexander told me that."
- "Well and good; August 28th was the last night she wore it. Now listen: if I say that Blinky took my piece of cambric off a long splinter in the end of a loose piece of railing that was the

only thing between him and a precipice of seventy feet, and that I saw him do so with my own eyes, will you admit that I have proved my point?"

Trezevant felt trapped; he could only gasp wildly: "You are wrong! There must be some mistake!"

"In the face of this disclosure, do you still insist that Diana Frewe did not go to the summer-house with Horace Vendire that night, and that she has no reasons for concealing the fact?"

"I cannot understand it; I can see how you believe you are right, but I am sure there is some explanation. Would you take her word?" he eagerly asked.

"No," said Mr. Blount, sadly, "I wouldn't

take her word."

"If you would not, I would," rejoined Trezevant, proudly. "I shall ask her, and what ever she says I'll believe."

"Do so by all means," said Mr. Blount, for-

mally.

"Trust me, I shall. Another thing has just occurred to me: you discovered blood stains on the cambric, you think they somehow got there that fatal night, you know she never wore the wrapper after that; may she not have given it to a servant, who could have torn it on the snag weeks afterwards?"

"Curious, coincidental combination," said Mr.

Blount, with a lightness that made George furious.

"That dress may have been washed and mended and altered in many ways before it went to the summer-house."

"It may, but I don't believe it."

"It might have been stained by the blood of some animal."

"No; the experts say it was human blood."

"That's tommy-rot; no one could tell after all this time. I don't believe any human being could tell anything about blood after it had been exposed to sun and rain for six months."

"The summer-house, you remember, has a roof, but maybe you are right," replied Blount, placidly. "Experts claim a lot. My friend Howe at the Polytechnic says that the blood of different individuals has different characteristics; that it is possible to recognize the sexes, and even one man's blood from another's. He also states that others go a step further and claim they can tell by a drop of blood whether the owner — would you call it? — was a blonde or a brunette. I cannot say I go quite that far; some things are a little too tough for a person of my age."

"There is some comfort in that; but you needn't think you have convinced me. I shall leave you now and to-night I am going to question Miss Frewe about the summer-house, and I shall

believe her implicitly. As I have never thought of asking her, she has not considered it worth while to say she was or was not there. Whatever you think to the contrary, she will tell me the truth, and it will be enough for me."

"Won't you drop in to-morrow at this hour, and let me know the result?"

George was inclined to refuse, but reconsidered. "You may expect me," he answered, leaving the office.

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGE'S QUESTION IS ANSWERED

WHEN George arrived at the Alexanders' that night, he found Diana Frewe alone, Charles and Constance having discreetly felt the need of exercise. Diana was in the little parlor, waiting for him, and she seemed so contentedly happy—there was such a new light in her face—that George's heart smote him when he thought of his errand. Would she look as happy when his visit was over? To conceal the anxiety that was pulling him like a weight, he said lightly?

"I suppose Mrs. Alexander has told you of

my faux pas this morning?"

"No; what was it?" and Diana, smiling demurely placed her hand on the white lace that Constance had forced her to wear.

Evidently Constance had failed to make good her threat. George was sorry, as he had counted on this to render his task easier.

"Didn't she tell you of our dress argument this morning, of how I hate to see you in black all the time?" he asked, absently. "She did, and you have not even noticed the deference I immediately proceeded to pay to your taste."

So preoccupied had he been with his mission that he had failed to see the lace, he now looked closely, as he thought, and said:

"How well you are looking to-night! You are lovely. What has changed you so?"

Diana laughed. "How like a man you are to-night! Evidently I have never been lovely or looked well before."

George stammered at the slip. "You know I did not mean that; I think it must be that white stuff."

"Worse and worse; it is not myself that is well-looking, but my lace."

"I did not come here to be ridiculed," said George, depressed at this inauspicious beginning.

"What did you come for?" This challenge was her old self, for the first time in many months, flashing out.

"To tell you that I am your devoted slave."

"Be careful; do not wander too near forbidden paths."

"Just for to-night; I promise you it will be the last time. I shall try to delude myself into thinking that you will care for me even if we do not succeed in solving the awful mystery."

"What a man!" thought she. Then aloud, "You promised not to refer to what may be,

until it can be," but the tone did not sound inexorable.

George took a seat by her side on the sofa; he took more—her hand. Then he said, simply, "I am happy when I am with you."

"Are you unhappy when away?"

"Extremely so; I am worried over the work I have undertaken with you."

Instantly Diana's face lost its radiant look, and she said sadly:

"Thank you for reminding me; in my new happiness I had almost forgotten — how it spoils everything!"

"I wish we might both forget, but, having taken up the duty, we will neither of us shirk it. I called on Mr. Blount to-day, by way of a beginning — he gets some curious notions."

"Curious, but generally near the truth. I haven't seen him for some time; what does he

think now?"

"Lots of strange and unwarrantable things. I think he knows all about your interview on the night of August 28th." And George, looking intently in her face, saw the color fade.

"Then all my qualms are for naught. How

on earth can he have found out?"

"Through the detectives, of course."

"And he suspects poor Charles," she cried, with hands clasped in dismay. "I was sure he would!"

"No; he says Charles had nothing to do with the murder and I think he means it."

"Thank fortune for that! What a mistake I made in not telling at first! I might have known they would find out. Are you sure he clears Charles?"

"He asserts it. Hadn't you better send for him, and tell him of the whole interview with your own lips?"

Diana blushed. "Do you think it would help

any? It would be excruciatingly painful."

"Diana, my darling, I am going to be very plain with you. Mr. Blount has a notion—groundless, I am sure—he has an idea—"Here George broke off. "I cannot tell you; you wouldn't let me come near you again as long as I live!"

"What on earth can you mean! You must tell me now!"

"Come close to me just once — there — lay your head on my breast. Do not shrink; it is no dishonor to the dead. I may kiss you on your pure forehead — no man has ever done that before? And to think you do not drive me away for my presumption! I must be dreaming. You are not angry, and you look at me with those romantic eyes as if you loved me just a little." Then a thought of the dead lover prevented the kiss that George was about to take from the trembling mouth, and he went on speaking in

a gentle sadness that made the girl look up wondering.

"Now that I have you where I want you, I am going to ask you a question. Whatever you assert I shall believe, so you can tell me anything you choose. Not all the detectives or lawyers in the world can disturb my faith."

"What an alarming prelude!" said Diana, from his shoulder. "What idea has Mr. Blount now?"

"A most foolish one; I hardly dare put it in words, but I want you to refute it and explain circumstances that he chooses to consider — unusual."

"Go on," said Diana, in a strained voice, closing her eyes as if to avoid something.

"I am sorry Constance did not tell you about the fleur-de-lis gown, for it would have paved the way for my story."

"What fleur-de-lis gown?"

"The one you wore the last time you ever saw Horace Vendire." He could feel her start. "I cannot go on," he cried, "it is too insulting!"

"You must go on; you have said too much to stop." And she lifted her head proudly from his shoulder. "What does Mr. Blount say about me? I knew it — I felt it!" she continued bitterly. "With all his protestations, he has never been one moment my friend."

"I think you wrong him there; he is very much your friend."

"However, it is not a question of Mr. Blount's

friendship. Finish your tale."

"Diana, love, you confided in me last evening; did you tell me all?"

In pitiful embarrassment she drew away.

"What can you mean?" she stammered.

"You are good, you are pure. So good and so pure that some day I want to call you 'wife.' But no man must ever think you have done what Mr. Blount thinks you did. Tell me, sweetheart, with your own lips — tell me that on that August night you did not — Diana, did you go? — I must say it! Did you have a rendezvous with that man in the summer-house on the cliff, clad in —"

But he was speaking to thin air, for Diana lay in his arms unconscious. He placed her at length on the sofa and chafed her hands. "Oh, what have I done!" he cried. Her face, frightfully pale, had blue lines about the mouth and nostrils. For one instant he faced another question. No, there was some explanation. Mr. Blount was wrong.

He called aloud for help. But Lawson, the only servant, corrupted by flat customs, was visiting two stories up the fire escape and did not hear. He dared not leave Diana for a moment.

How long that unconsciousness was lasting! Suppose? But she must recover, she must ex-

plain! Her eyelids quivered. She was living. He wished he knew where Constance kept things; he ought to give a stimulant — he was sure of that — and he looked wildly in impossible places, but the best he could find was a glass of water. He moistened his handkerchief and tenderly wiped her face, and, this being inefficacious, he dashed the entire contents of the glass over her face and hair.

Diana gasped, as the water shocked her back to her senses.

"I must tell," she whispered. "It may be the last chance. Oh, what will you think?"

He knelt by her side. "I trust you," he said, and his own heart and hope revived in the saying.

"You must remember," she began, drawing in her quivering lips in the effort at self-control. "that at the time of that interview my wedding day was but one week off. I say this to excuse, if I can, my allowing myself to be influenced. You, of course, recall all the circumstances of Horace Vendire's being detained in town on that dreadful night?"

George nodded.

"My room at Hillside was on the second floor; Constance's you know, was on the first in the front of the cottage, mine being over the diningroom. We locked up the house and separated early: about midnight I was roused by a voice calling me by name, and I thought I had dreamed,

but presently there was a rattling sound at the shutter, as if pebbles had been thrown, and when I went to the window, not knowing what to think, a voice that I recognized whispered for me to come down immediately. I was so bewildered at the request at such an hour that I could only stammer out some question — I have forgotten what.

"'This is no time for words,' he whispered; if you don't come down, I will climb the apple tree and get into your window, for see you I will on matters of the gravest importance.'

"He always had his way — you know that — so it is not surprising that I agreed to come down and began to dress rapidly.

"'What are you about?' he called, impatiently. I told him I had to dress. 'D—n the clothes! Come as you are! Every moment is precious; someone may come.'

"Hardly knowing what I was about, I threw a wrapper over my nightgown, and, thrusting my feet into slippers, went downstairs. When I got out of doors, I could see his face in the dim light, and it was hard and set. I knew the look. It meant will. 'For heaven's sake, tell me what has happened, but speak low,' I cried.

"I do not know whether you realize the effect, or rather the influence, this man always had over me. It was not hypnotism, for I was conscious every moment of my power to reason and act, but it was a fascination almost as compelling — more physical than mental, I think, for his beauty was unusual.

"'Come with me out of sight and sound of the house,' said he, and, seizing my hand, he hurried me across the field to the summer-house, before I knew where we were going or had time to protest."

"Blount was right about that, anyhow," ejaculated George, but Diana let the interruption pass

unnoticed.

"As I remember, terrified curiosity as to the cause for such secrecy was my only sensation. I was soon enlightened, when he said that I must come with him that very hour. 'This house is no place for my wife,' said he. 'Charles Alexander is a villain, who shall never see or speak to you again!'

"I have forgotten what I said, but I must have protested. 'Yes, he is a villain!' he went on, 'and he knows that I know it. It has made him so desperate that he has threatened to poison your mind against me as soon as he has the chance. I have come to take you away.'

"I implored him to tell me what it all meant, and I never can forget his disclosure: 'I surprised Charles Alexander—the model, moral Alexander—in my room at the Dinsmore, rummaging in my papers. He is a common thief!'

"At this, so great was the shock that I nearly

fainted. Then he told me a tale of leaving the hotel on his wheel, and of returning for something forgotten, to find Charles reading his private papers. Still I could not grasp it. 'What could have been his object?' I demanded.

"'The object is plain; he is on the verge of bankruptcy, and is trying to make us save him by working our company for a good round sum. He has cut prices, cost us thousands of dollars, but in trying to ruin us, he has swamped himself.'

"'But you were going to buy him out,' said I, remembering his promise of two days before.

"'True, at your entreaties, for your sake, but he did not know that.'

"It was a muddle to me. 'What could he want with your papers?' I urged.

"'I have no time to explain now,' he answered, 'nor would you understand a complicated business matter, for those papers contained secrets which it was of the utmost importance he should know; without them he couldn't tell how big a price he might force us to pay.'

"It may seem strange that I could be deceived, but Horace Vendire's story was so straight that I did not then doubt it. He seemed fresh from the scene and full of its sensations. My one thought was to prevent the two men from meeting in anger, and of keeping Constance from the disgrace of an exposure. I suppose the shock, the sudden rousing from sleep and the hour, ren-

dered me incapable of reasoning. 'Charles has been so good to me!' I remember I exclaimed, and I wept in my distress.

"'I know that,' he replied, 'and for your sake again I will spare him public disgrace. But you must not stay another minute under his roof; you must come with me to the village, and we will knock up the minister and be married.'

"As I before told you, the storm was then threatening, and because of that, the hour, and my vanity, I begged for time and daylight; so he said that, since I would not see the villain — meaning Charles — as he was safe in town for the night, he would let me wait until morning, if I would promise not to reveal a word of our interview. I promised and started to leave, when he said something about how I looked in the dull moonlight and the flashing lightning, and his tone frightened me — how can I tell you all this!" implored Diana, hiding her face, but Trezevant's look compelled her and she continued,—

"When he put his arm around me to draw me to him, I sought to escape and begged him to let me go, but he only drew me closer, and said:

"' Kiss me just once — wife."

"Go on," said George, hoarsely, as she paused, seeing him shudder.

"I refused, he grabbed me roughly. Do not ask me what he said then — I broke from him and ran; that was the time I hurt my arm on

something — I only vaguely felt it — I gained my room — I hardly remember how — and you know the rest."

At her last words, George, wincing, knelt before her, gazing into her sad eyes as if he would read her soul. She returned the look unflinchingly.

"I believe," said he, and it was as if he were saying the Creed, "that you have told me truthfully everything." And at his words the relief was so great that Diana's self-control was swept away, and she wept comforting tears in his arms.

CHAPTER IX

1-5-6-3!

THE day after these events, Blinky, skimming on his bicycle, overtook Fred Poppy, also awheel. A glance showed the boy that the wheel was a Climber.

"Howdy," said Blinky, in affable forgetfulness of former meetings.

"Howdy; taking a constitutional?" asked

Poppy.

"Takin' my breath o' life. Ain't there some of the beatenest people in this worl'?"

"I should say so; mean anybody in particu-

lar?"

- "I was pinting at those as don't ride bicycles, en I'm sorry to say Mr. Blount's one of 'em."
- "I did not think you would criticize his Majesty."
- "On that one subjick, I'm kinder out with him. You see he's got flabby en yaller, en he's off his feed, en blue in his mine, en there's his cure right to hand, which he won't take."

"Rather sad; what is the cure?"

- "Biking, of course what should it be?"
- "I see you keep up your enthusiasm."

"It keeps me up. Look at me. Em I ever blue en flabby? Does I ever ruffuse food? En why don't I? Because I ride. I tell you doctors may dose en preachers may preach, but the quickest way to git there is on a machine."

"Where? To health, heaven, or where you

are now going?"

"All three of 'em," answered Blinky, soberly. "Ef there was a law making ever'body ride, there'd be no detectives needed."

"How do you make that out?"

"Has you ever heard of a murderer on a wheel?"

Poppy had to admit that he never had.

"Does burglars break into houses ef they ride wheels?"

"Now that I come to think of it, I have never heard of a burglar on a bicycle in my life."

Blinky made a mental reservation, and said: "Naw, en you never will. When a party's on a wheel, whatever they do really be other times, they can't think of no mischieviousness then. They's jest innercent, and thet's all they is to it! Ef it ain't the greatist thing in this worl', I'd like to know what's greater!" and Blinky in his enthusiasm clasped his hands and narrowly escaped a high curbstone.

"Lookout," called Poppy, "or you'll have a smashup. Here's my place — tra-la."

"So long," rejoined Blinky, whizzing round a

corner. But the moment Poppy was safely in the house, Blinky returned, and, leaning his own machine against the curbstone, approached the other wheel.

"I knowed it was a Climber, but I'll be hanged ef the number ain't been filed off!"

"Say, what are you doing there!" shouted an angry voice, and Poppy reappeared, his affability scattered. "Just you let my machine alone, or I'll beat the life out of you. You are up to some mischief, sneaking back in this manner!" The man's face was red with anger, and his eyes sparkled with malignity.

Blinky was caught. "I come back to look at them curious cranks of yourn. Ain't they too long for comfort?"

Policy calmed Poppy. He had to accept the obviously false explanation, so he answered: "They are the only kind for the hills; ever try a Climber? Very popular make."

"No end er style," said Blinky, walking round the wheel. "Gee Whillikins! Wouldn't I like to try her!" And Blinky looked from Poppy's wheel to his own in seeming contempt. "Say, what'll you take to let me have a spin on her? I'll be jest as careful, en bring her back in fi' minutes as right as a trivet."

But Poppy declined. He was not in the habit of lending his wheel to boys, not even when they were such proficient riders as Blinky. "En so you wont lemme it? Well, 'fare ye well, Brer Watkins,'" and leaving Fred Poppy, Blinky returned to make a report to Blount.

The encounter worried Poppy. He sought his spouse and told her: "The kid had some notion in his head; do you think whoever owned my wheel could have set him on?"

"You are the biggest fool!" was Jane's complimentary reply. "A man leaves his bicycle under a shed for two months; you see it there; you don't know whose it is; it's never been advertised; so you, as the finder, have as much right to it as anybody."

"That's all true, and I have looked for advertisements straight along, you know. But that brat is as smart as they make 'em, and he was on some trail as sure as my name's Poppy."

Here Mrs. Poppy was obliged to do what was rare; she agreed with her husband, and it made her ponder. In a few hours she had solved her enigma.

"I have it, and I wonder we did not think of it before. With all our experience we are not as bright as the boy." She held a greasy copy of the newspaper containing the offer of the Vendire rewards.

"I do not see what those rewards have to do with it?"

"Don't you, chucklehead? Then I'll show you. Do you see that?" She pointed a stubby,

dirty finger at the description of Horace Vendire. "Yes, I see that and I know it by heart," said

Poppy, stubbornly.

"You do, do you? And if you had a little more head to know it by, it might serve you better." Then she read: "'Horace Vendire, when last seen, took his wheel and left the Dinsmore Hotel.' Now, whoever finds that wheel is on the straight road to a fortune, and that is what Blinky is after as sure as my name is Jane Teufelstochter Poppy!"

"Jane, you are a genius," said Poppy, in genuine admiration.

Jane was mollified, but soon another thought dashed her complacency. "Popp, if Horace Vendire's bicycle was a Climber, that brat of a boy may make trouble on account of your having filed the number off that machine of yours. If you ain't the devil for blunders!"

Poppy turned white; this was serious. He had purloined the wheel for the reason that it was second nature with him to take everything he conveniently could. He had been afraid to ride it at first; but no inquiry having been made, he had filed off the number and ridden it with zest. "A second-hand thing bought at auction," he explained.

Poppy thought he had better find out whether Mr. Vendire's wheel was a Climber, and, if so, what was its number. It was an old question, and

brought a prompt reply: "It was a Climber, and its number 1-5-6-3."

Poppy began his search for the missing wheel, and at last called on the Prosecuting Attorney, strutting with pride and importance.

"The grand jury meets soon, doesn't it?" he

asked.

"Yes, in two weeks."

"I have something to bring before it."

"What is it?"

"If I have discovered anything, remember, I am entitled to rewards whether I tell you or not?"

"Of course; out with it."

"You.remember the old Vendire case?"

Mr. Devin rather thought he did.

"Is it your opinion that, if Horace Vendire's bicycle were discovered, the present owner would be liable to a legal investigation?"

"I should say so, unless he were able to explain clearly and naturally how it came into his possession."

Poppy then read the answer he had received to

his inquiry concerning the wheel.

"That is no news," said Devin. "We have had this number for some time, but it has never been of service; whoever murdered Horace Vendire made way with his wheel when he disposed of the body."

"Will you come with me?"

It was about six o'clock in the afternoon, and

Poppy led Mr. Devin to the Dinsmore. In the vestibule outside the large office, standing like horses in their stalls, were fifty or more bicycles of all descriptions. Fred Poppy went unhesitatingly to one of them, and pointed silently to the number on the hub of the crank. Mr. Devin put on his glasses, stooped, and read, "1-5-6-3."

"Whose is it?" he asked, eagerly.

"Remember, I found it," babbled Poppy, "and if it leads to anything, the reward is mine, and mine alone."

"Of course; who is riding it?"

"The person who is riding that bicycle," said Poppy, rolling the words unctiously, "is a gentleman with whom we are all well acquainted. I have always known what he really is, but I never have been able to bring Mr. Blount or any of you to my way of thinking."

"Don't talk so much; what's his name?"

"His name is Mr. Charles Alexander."

Mr. Blount had been more than interested in the discovery of the numberless Climber being ridden by Poppy, but he floundered around in a mass of deductions.

"Of course, there is something crooked about it, but if he is in any way connected with the disappearance I fail to see how. He might possibly have been prowling round, as usual, the night of August 28th, and found the wheel just as he found

the cane — where it wasn't lost. It may be Vendire's bicycle. I think I'll let Blinky get possession of that wheel anyway, for we might identify other parts without the number."

Here Mr. Blount went off on a lead he had never before followed, but it must have been over a rough, jolting road, for he shook his head frequently, and said: "If that is so, what a fool I have been! What a fool I have been!"

"Any orders, pard?" asked the effluent Blinky, who had come quietly in and had heard the last remark.

"None except to keep your eyes open everywhere. I reckon you had better shadow Poppy for a few days."

"Black or white?"

"Black is best," meaning that Blinky was to be the smartest little mulatto that ever lurked in alleys or played marbles in the gutters.

Poppy had never been an easy man to follow, and time had not improved him. His ins and outs were rapid and numerous, and his associates of a variety that made Blinky's task no sinecure. He did his best, however, and Blinky's best generally had results.

He knew the exact moment when Poppy began his bicycle hunt.

"Hur? Somebody else wants er slice, does they? Not ef I knows it — not ef I knows it!" He went to report. "Don't it kinder knock out

our new trail, his huntin' for the bicycle, pard?"

"Maybe he knows you are after him, and it's a blind."

"That's jest the ticket, I reckon," said the boy, and he continued his espionage with greater care, but no less vigor.

He reported that Poppy had been to the Dinsmore inspecting all the wheels.

"Did you look at them also?"

"Natch'ly; all the Climbers of 'em."

"You must recollect one thing, boy: in order to keep track of wheels in a hotel, you must take them every hour in the day. With so many people in and out, the stock is changeable. I've never thought much of the wheel theory, anyway, and this wheel business at the hotel is limited; you can't work it often."

"I've done it fi' times erready, en I 'spect to do it fi' times more 'fore I die."

The next day Blinky was shooting marbles on the sidewalk in front of the Dinsmore, when Miss Frewe called, in her carriage. Blinky saw her drop a package, and ran after her to restore it. Being on the Poppy scent, he was not recognized, and was given a nickel for his services — in all ignorance.

The episode tickled Blinky to death. "It only shows how puffick I em in ennything I undertakes," he said, naïvely.

But poor Blinky had only one more opportunity

to play his "puffick" rôle. The next day he spied on Poppy examining wheels at the Dinsmore. In a few minutes he saw Poppy come back with Mr. Devin. He saw Poppy and Mr. Devin look at one particular wheel eagerly, excitedly, and he saw the attorney make a note in his little book.

Blinky could hardly wait for them to get out of sight before he went to the wheels to see what they had seen, and, as if in figures of flame, he saw on a Climber bicycle.

" 1-5-6-3!"

This was shock enough, but when Charles Alexander came out and, mounting that bicycle, rode away, Blinky could have killed him, Fred Poppy, and Mr. Devin, in his chagrin at being so over-reached.

He returned forlornly home. The lawyer heard his story in silence, and before he had finished, had on his hat and coat and was on his way to the Alexanders'.

CHAPTER X

CHARLES IS WARNED

WHEN Mr. Blount arrived at the apartmenthouse where the Alexanders lived, he sent for Charles to come downstairs and while he waited he paced the corridor, consternation written on every feature.

"Come out for a walk," said the lawyer, "for I have something serious to tell you."

They walked side by side in silence for several blocks, until Mr. Blount turned into a lonely street, saying that he wanted to get away from any peepers. Then he began:

"You have no time to lose, Mr. Alexander. Your enemy, Fred Poppy, has tracked you, and, if I do not mistake, before long you will be required to tell all you know about August 28th." Could Charles have seen Blount's face as he said these words, he would have marveled at the look of shame.

"It is evident that you know everything," said Charles. "You can understand that, for various reasons, I prefer not to be obliged to tell about that night, but neither Poppy nor anybody else can threaten me. If I come to the witness stand, I

shall answer every question accurately and truthfully — that goes without saying."

Blount gasped. "You would! My dear fellow, do not think you have to; the court cannot make you incriminate yourself, and there were no witnesses. The only point they can make against you is the bicycle; you are to be called to account for that; it is what I came to tell you about. Even that charge can fall unsupported, and if proved need not prove complicity. Of course, to a man in your position it will be dreadful to have suspicion—"

- "What are you talking about? What bicycle and what complicity?"
- "Helping Miss Frewe, and riding Horace Vendire's bicycle."
- "In the name of thunder, Mr. Blount, have you gone daft?"

Mr. Blount began to think maybe he had, the man's astonishment was so genuine. He repeated his remark.

"Perhaps I am muddled to-night, but you will have to talk English if you wish me to understand," persisted Charles.

"I've done enough for you against my conscience," said Mr. Blount, in some heat; "denial to me is unworthy of you. I know all about your interview with Diana Frewe that fatal night—that you helped her conceal the accidental or rather

unpremeditated crime, and that you are at present riding Vendire's wheel —"

Before the words were fairly out, the lawyer dodged Charles's doubled fist and caught the offending hand.

"Softly, Alexander, I'm your friend. I wouldn't try bluffing with blows, if I were you, for I am more than your match and in practice besides. I'm your friend — the best friend you have in the world."

"You must explain or apologize before I can regard you as a friend."

"Both, if it will please you. Poor boy! Don't be so mad," for Charles was actually snorting with rage. "Here you are free, yet I could give a signal that in an instant would bring me a score of police."

Charles made a vigorous effort for self-control. "You must tell me what you mean."

"First of all, I will tell you what I know. I know that on the night of August 28th, you surprised Horace Vendire's tools in your office, engaged in a nefarious act, one for which you might possibly have sent him to the penitentiary, with his companions. I know you wrote him a violent note, and that, after receiving the note, he went on his wheel to your home in the country. Here he had an interview with his fiancée in the summerhouse on the cliff — don't speak yet. What hap-

pened there I partly know; the rest I can deduce. Dead men tell no tales — keep still! Wait till you hear me out! You arrive. You find her in the summer-house. Horace Vendire has left for parts unknown."

In spite of the emphasis on the last sentence, Charles did not see its real meaning.

- "You are all wrong," he interrupted; "there was no summer-house in the business."
- "No one knows but yourself what followed when you met Miss Frewe and learned her predicament."
- "What predicament? I did not meet Miss Frewe until I went to the house, and I did not know of her interview until weeks afterwards."
- "I say no one knows but you two, and neither of you will be required to tell, so we will skip that part for you mustn't tell me the details I might be asked, you know and come down to the present time."
- "Mr. Blount, you're all wrong; somebody has been hoaxing you."
- "To-day," pursued Mr. Blount, as if he were deaf, "to-day Fred Poppy brought Mr. Devin to look at your bicycle standing in the corridor of the Dinsmore."
 - "What if he did?"
- "A great deal. It is a Climber. Its number is 1-5-6-3."
 - "Is it? You and Fred Poppy know much

more than I do, for I have never looked at the number."

"Haven't you really? I should advise you to lose no time in so doing, for it is significant. Many persons know that 1-5-6-3 is the number of the dead man's wheel. You gave Blinky the address of the factory so that he could find out—smart trick that. He got the number, and, though he has been on the lookout ever since, Fred Poppy got ahead of him and examined your wheel."

"And you say the number given by the factory is the number of my wheel?"

" I do."

"Then I must say it beats me. If the factory hasn't got our numbers mixed, I must have changed sometime with Vendire without knowing it. How it could have happened without either of us being aware of it, I fail to see."

"Could it have happened, and neither of you know?"

"It might; though every man thinks he knows his own wheel. Vendire liked a trifle higher saddle than I do, and his handle-bars were higher; still, a man riding constantly, with weighty affairs in hand, as in my case, might get used to any little differences without remarking them. Vendire would have been more apt to notice a change than I, as he was — Look here! Are you sure I am riding his wheel?"

"You are riding the number given by the factory as his wheel."

"The factory has mixed them; though mine was

bought several weeks later than his."

"You see you will have something to prove, my friend, which is why I have come to warn you."

"I suppose you meant kindly, but — excuse me — your insinuations are too insulting. However, I must think over that bicycle business."

"Do so, but, in the mean time, don't you think you ought to get your wife out of the way? There's going to be a muss when that grand jury meets, and we want to spare her, don't we?"

Charles was touched at this. Though following false premises, Mr. Blount was thoughtful and considerate. Later, he would convince him of his mistakes; at present, the bicycle business must be sifted, so he said:

"In spite of your wandering so wide of the mark, I believe you are really my friend; perhaps I should not have been so hasty. When does the grand jury meet?"

"In two weeks. In the mean time be careful, as you will probably be watched."

Charles winced and was about to show his indignation, when he thought of the patient Mr. James Vendire, and said quietly:

"I will try to bear the watching for my wife's sake, and because it should mean nothing to an in-

nocent man. Thank you, Mr. Blount; if I lost control of myself in the surprise you gave me, it was because I have never imagined such things could be thought of Charles Alexander. I am now myself, and better able to appreciate your service of to-night. Do you think the watching has begun yet? I am going right away to tell Mr. James about that midnight discovery before he hears it in court."

Mr. Blount left him at the Roxbury, and went home, absorbed in restless conjecture. "Can I be altogether wrong?" he asked himself. "That man doesn't know what acting is — well a courageous man is capable of mounting to impossible heights to save a woman."

Charles's interview with Mr. James Vendire was affecting, but it again proved the sincerity and depth of all former professions. Intuitively, he understood Charles's motives in hushing up the matter even after the Trust had angered him by denial, also that he had not been reduced to silence by the fact that he had made an unproved assertion, as all Charles had to do was to force a comparison between the figures found and his company's books. Here was a service Mr. James could render the friend who had stood by him, believing in his innocence. He begged to be allowed to go on Charles's bond, if the latter should be arrested.

"I must think about that," said Charles. "Wouldn't people talk — his own brother?"

"You mean it might revive suspicions? Yes, it might; but such a consideration has no weight, the only question being whether it would be the best for your case."

Charles pressed his hand, and left, deeply moved.

When he reached home, Constance came into the hall as soon as she heard his key in the latch—"To prevent another curtain raiser," she whispered, but something in her husband's expression checked her laugh.

"What has happened?" she asked.

He put his arm around her waist and half carried her into the room where he found George and Diana.

"Something has happened," said he, "but you must not think it so very dreadful, for I believe that we shall be able to convince people and the jury that I am innocent."

"Innocent! Jury! Oh, what is it?"

"It is the end of one thing, anyhow. Waste no more time, George, in fighting the Trust, for you will have to do it alone, and you haven't strength, time, or money. It is sauve qui peut now, in earnest. The unceasing labors of the Poppy-Cabell combination have brought fruit. They have made a discovery that will probably result

in my indictment by the grand jury and long weeks of worry, expense, and possible absence, if they refuse bail, for I may have to go — "

"Don't say the word!" cried George.

"I know what it is, Charles," cried Diana. "We will go together, brother, will we not?"

"Tell her she has no need — that there would be no sense in such a thing," cried George, while Constance looked from one speaker to another in the most complete bewilderment.

"No such sacrifice is yet required, Diana," said Charles. "If you will be cautious, it may never be. Think how it will comfort me to feel that you are with Constance."

"What is all this?" asked Constance, more and more perplexed. "You speak as if you could leave me — your wife."

Then he told her, making light of possibilities, though not disguising the facts concerning the Poppy discovery — told her of Diana's midnight interview with the missing man, and all that might be implied. Charles had a picture of her lovely, arch face when she had refused that second goodbye kiss not two hours before. Now her features had a gray look, as with intense effort she stilled all outer manifestation of her suffering — such a look as Madame Roland must have worn to the scaffold.

"Was there no other way?" cried Diana, re-

proachfully. "Constance, speak! Say something!" for Constance's eyes looked glazed and unseeing. "Did you have to tell her!"

"Constance, my precious life," said Charles, with his arms about her, "don't fail us, for we need all your help, your practical sense. Don't let this break you—for my sake—for Diana's!"

This appeal roused her. The old pioneer blood that had been kept back by generations of luxurious living answered to the call, and Constance faced the future.

"Only give me time; it is so much more than anything I have ever thought could happen. Arrested, and on such a charge! I'll get used to it, and I will not fail you."

"He is not arrested yet, and lots of things can happen before the grand jury meets. Let us not exhaust ourselves by useless fears, but think, and think well, what can be done," said Diana, cheeringly.

"All of us know what would save him; we will hope for that. We are all working for the same

end; where shall we begin?" asked George.

Diana answered the question. "The doctor has ordered me to the country and it will be beneficial, not to say cheaper, for all of us. I think the first thing to do is to go back to Hillside; then we are on the spot where he was last seen and work from the true starting point."

"How brave of you to propose that!" said Constance, touched.

"It can be managed, I think," said Charles. "Mr. Clark must have an agent here; we will lose no time in trying to rent from him, and as he bought most of our things it will be very little trouble to move."

"We have two weeks, and perhaps longer," said George. "Let us make these two weeks memorable. Diana and Charles, the chief sufferers, shall not outdo us in fortitude."

"Thank you, George. These two weeks shall prove us all, whether we be brave or craven. We shall have much to do." Then she asked, unflinchingly, "Of course, even if arrested they will let you out on bail?"

"Presumably," said Charles, and he told of Mr. James's offer.

For a moment she was again overcome; then she said, with her quick conclusiveness, "But can we let him? No; we cannot expose him to the criticism that acceptance of such a favor will provoke—his own brother!"

"What do Rumsey and Randolph say?" asked Diana, "or is Mr. Blount to manage this case?"

"I have seen no lawyer; I cannot employ any," said Charles. "I have exhausted every source of revenue in the Trust fight. I cannot pay lawyers."

Constance choked at this, and George said, almost irritably:

"But you have to have lawyers; don't carr your squeamishness too far!"

Constance gave a speechless and grateful look but Charles replied:

"The court will appoint them."

And Constance cried out, "George! Diana make him listen! Rumsey and Randolph wil trust him, I know!"

But Charles was firm.

After some further conversation George lef them, and the others separated for the night—Charles to sleep, but Constance to lie with staring eyes, trying to solve the question of obtaining wha she must have, to pay for the defense of all tha was priceless to her.

CHAPTER XI

REPARATION

WHEN Charles awoke the next morning, he was surprised to find Constance gone and a note lying on his pillow. His surprise changed to alarm when he read the note; for she had written to say that she had gone to see about raising money to pay his lawyers, and that she did not intend to return without it. He dressed hurriedly and sought Diana, who gave him his coffee and what comfort she could. No, she knew nothing; though Constance had requested her to see to things while she was gone.

Charles was entirely at sea. "I hope she hasn't taken up extreme ideas about getting work, or a position anywhere. What could she do? Even if I gave my consent, neither her health nor her Aunt Sarah's pride would permit it."

But his suspense was short-lived, for just then Constance returned, walking slowly, as if she were an old woman, and in truth she had aged years during the night. She came behind her husband's chair and kissed him upon the temple; and with her two arms over his shoulders, she said:

"As soon as you have finished your breakfast,

you must go to Rumsey and Randolph. I telephoned on the way home, and one of them will wait for you. I have the promise of three thousand dollars now, and more later; will that be enough? I got it from Aunt Sarah."

"But, Constance, dearest, while I appreciate it and know how hard it must have been for you to ask, I cannot take her money — you know I cannot."

"You are not taking her money. She considers it a privilege, and she has the equivalent; she will come later with the papers for you to sign. I have sold her — my half of the old home."

As she said the words, she turned away her face and went into the next room, followed by her husband and Diana. She sank into an armchair, and looked vacantly from the window at the sparrows on a neighboring roof. Charles took her hands and pressed them against his heart.

"Such love — such sacrifice for me! How did you ever bring yourself to do it?"

"It seems so little by comparison," she said, smiling sadly. "It was no sudden idea, as you imagine, for the struggle has taken place on several previous emergencies, so a great deal of it was left behind; last night was only going over old ground. It was easy to give up luxuries, pretty clothes, amusements, friends, when you have needed money and I was trying to help; but I have

prayed a thousand times, 'I will give up everything else but the old home, built by my people and never in strangers' hands; take anything but that, O Lord!' And I have always thought that some day we would live there; that our child would be born there, would play under its old trees and look from its dear little many-paned windows. Then, last night, came this dreadful thing; and when you announced that you could not even engage a lawyer to prove your innocence, I knew what I was going to do, but did not tell for fear you would stop me.

"I got up early this morning; I went to the old house, down the long walk leading to the front door, not daring to look up or round; yet, somehow, the little square porch was not empty; a dear face smiled at me from an easy cushioned chair, and the eyebrow transom seemed to catch the morning light and send out rays like a sun. Am I not silly and romantic?"

Charles was too affected to speak, and Diana choked.

"I went in and sent a message to Aunt Sarah. Her husband is out of town, so she sent for me to come right up. She knew it was something serious before I told her. Of course, it was an awful shock."

"I can imagine it — a Parker married to a man accused of larceny!"

"That is exactly what she said, and I replied, But, Aunt Sarah, one can't help being accused of things."

"I know, Constance, but if it had only been

something nobler!'

"And I laughed — I really did. 'Something noble — such as murder,' I suggested." (Diana shuddered.) "Then she said nice things about you, and offered to pay all the lawyer's bills herself, if she had to give up her next Paris jaunt to do it. I declined, and told her my plan. I would sell outright, and make it final; but she said that her life interest, with its reversion to me, would complicate matters, so she would buy the right to my share during her life, and I could will the whole property to her so that she would not lose it if she should outlive me."

Charles could not protest — how could he? — he read her heart.

"I forgot to say," she added, "that she says if we should come out of this all right, and have the money later, I can buy it back; but I do not see that day."

"But I do," said Charles, courageously. "Dear Aunt Sarah! I have never half appreciated her!"

Charles then went to Mr. Randolph, who was waiting for him. The lawyer looked grave when he heard the latest developments, being forced to admit that there was enough to justify an arrest, and that the comparatively simple accusation of

grand larceny might lead to implication in a far more serious crime. At best, even if his lawyers, got him off on a technicality, the bicycle accusation, being unexplained, might taint his whole future career.

"The worst of it is, I do not see how we are to get at the truth of the exchange of bicycles."

"Of course, we shall use every means to do that. We can't steal a march on Poppy by having him arrested for burglary, as too much time has elapsed since you saw him at your safe; besides, you had no witnesses, and even if you could prove the act, it would only give further grounds for suspicion — a motive for revenge."

"You think Miss Frewe and I are in close quarters, then?"

"I fear so. Have the Poppys mixed her up in this yet?"

"No; and I do not think they will, for two reasons: they don't know that she was the last person to see Horace Vendire alive, and she is to pay half of the reward. Their chief object, after all, is not me, but the reward. Can't we avoid bringing her on the stand?"

"In justice to you, I do not see how. If the wheel business did not give them so much ground, we might manage."

"In one thing I must be positive: Miss Frewe must not be called on to save me by turning suspicion to herself. She would do it with her eyes

open; she is that kind. But she is as innocent as I am. A man can stand such things and outlive them, but a woman—"

"So about the only thing you could prove would be disadvantageous to you. With his brother's help, you could prove that Horace Vendire had in his possession figures that could only have been obtained in some way or other from your books. You can't prove that Poppy and Cabell were his tools, which might be worth something, or even that he obtained these figures by underhand methods. If you could prove this, we might weaken the Poppys' claim considerably, but as we can't we will seek other means."

Later in the day, Charles sought Mr. Clark's agent, from whom he had no difficulty in renting Hillside. He determined they would move as soon as Constance could get ready. She must not be in town, if he was to be arrested, but far away from all newspapers, scandal-mongers — even the sympathy of well-meaning friends, and in the pure air of her beloved hills.

That evening, when he went home, he found everything as cheerful as if nothing had happened. Diana and Constance had braced each other with resolves during the day, and the making of his home a place where he could forget was not the least of them. He was with his wife in their own room, when a mysterious note was brought in:

"Hold out a little longer," was all it-said.

Constance knew the handwriting, the purple seal, and the trace of fine cigars. "It is from Arthur Cabell," she said. "Don't do anything he advises."

Charles laughed. "His advice so coincides with my judgment and my necessity that I will have to take it. What object can he have, though?"

The first note was followed by another the next day, and this one had a signature.

"My dear Mr. Alexander:-

"Will you honor a man who cannot long bother you, and come to the Wickliffe infirmary without loss of time?"

Charles said nothing to Constance, who would have been sure to imagine a plot, but went.

It was the sad eleventh hour, and the sinner desired to right what wrongs he could. He had also summoned Mr. Randolph to take his statement in case it should be needed. He told of Horace Vendire's system of bribery for obtaining secret information concerning his rivals, of his own connection with several pieces of Trust dirty work, besides recounting in full the scene Charles had witnessed. He was perceptibly weaker at the end, but was able to sit up and sign his name firmly.

"Tell Constance I have made this reparation for her sake. If I had not lost her —" he turned

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his face to the wall without finishing the sentence. Charles took his departure, thinking, "Small use of all this now."

The papers the next morning announced the death of Arthur Cabell. Mr. Randolph came in to say that he had made a will giving the few hundreds left from a small fortune to Charles, requesting him to "hold out."

CHAPTER XII

SOME POINTS ON FISHING

THE Prosecuting Attorney was very busy, these days, for he had several visitors whose suggestions made him both think and act. The first was George Trezevant, who said he had heard of the discovery of the missing bicycle being ridden by his friend and partner, but that it proved nothing, for, as Charles Alexander kept two wheels, riding first one then the other, and as Mr. Vendire had frequently been his guest, it was plain that the exchange had been made inadvertently; at least, Mr. Devin had better be sure, before he allowed himself to be entangled in another Craft-Gunn affair.

While Devin's sympathies had really been with Mr. James Vendire in his trial, he had never recovered from the soreness of that piece of blundering. He could not bear the slightest allusion to it; consequently, Trezevant's warning that a mistake such as arresting Charles Alexander would take them further away from the true scent and expose him to ridicule, had its effect, and Devin resolved to require additional proof before risking another blunder.

Devin would probably have done nothing further, had not George's visit been followed by another. Mr. Claws, on a flying trip to Lewiston, came bowling in. Mr. Devin was in a juicy mood; that is to say, he was easily squeezed by Mr. Claws who soon learned the latest developments concerning the bicycle, and the consequent trend of suspicion.

Then Mr. Claws played fine. In that easy, careless way of his, he sowed seed; and, the ground being soft, they stayed where they fell and they sprouted. He said what a shame it was that any man with fair prospects and sound credit should have elected, for the sake of private vengeance, to walk in the ways of crookedness. Mr. Devin assented, as if he knew many instances of such straying, though he couldn't just then think of any save Alexander and the bicycle.

"Take that pretended discovery of his," said the Trust president. "I was never so shocked in my life. As soon as he saw it wouldn't go through, he dropped it like a hot potato and has never referred to it since."

"What discovery?" asked Devin.

"I thought you might have heard Mr. Poppy mention it; as you haven't, I would rather not be the one to tell you, so, if you please, we will drop the matter; am sorry I made the slip, as I hate gossip. To go back to the Vendire affair, I have read and re-read the evidence in the Craft-Gunn

trial, and I am particularly struck by the frequent mention of our poor president's name in connection with this party of whom we are speaking."

"How — connection?" asked Devin, floundering.

"Read it yourself. Take, for instance, that last known communication with the missing man—that note written to him, sent to him that night. I have often wondered what reason Mr. Alexander could have had for writing when he could have spoken—in the same hotel—rooms on the same floor—does it seem to you as if the two could have been as friendly as they pretended?"

Mr. Devin answered promptly that he himself had often wondered whether they were; but Mr. Vendire had been staying at Hillside, which implied friendship, at least on his side.

"Another thing," continued Mr. Claws; "Mr. Alexander, strange as it may seem, was not summoned as a witness in that case; could Rumsey and Randolph have a reason?"

"They are Alexander's lawyers — do all the firm's business," answered Mr. Devin.

"In that case, of course, they were bound to shield him," said Mr. Claws, with finesse.

"From what?" asked Devin, agape.

Mr. Claws shrugged his shoulders. "That is none of my business," with an emphasis on the pronoun not thrown away.

When his visitor left, Mr. Devin felt that he had not done his duty; though the casual hint by the innocent Mr. Claws had shown him the way to retrieve. He sent for Fred Poppy, and asked him whether he could find out why the note had been written and its contents.

As may be easily imagined, the commission caused Poppy some embarrassment. He first said that it was something about the trunk, which Mr. Vendire had left at the Alexanders' and which had been sent to the express office by mistake; and then he offered to ask Mr. Claws outright. Mr. Claws had flitted, no one knew whither. Poppy came to report this, and promised the attorney to find out why the note had been written, though he did not tell how the promise was to be redeemed.

Poppy really thought he was on the track of something incriminating besides the bicycle, as he had never before had it suggested to him that the note might have something to do with the disappearance.

Poppy's wife was a woman of resource. She knew lawyers' ways, and lawyers' stenographers. She found out something that surprised both herself and her spouse; namely, the particulars of that last interview between Diana Frewe and Horace Vendire as given by Charles Alexander to his lawyers during the James Vendire trial. But — alackaday! — she discovered also what

Poppy had concealed from her—his act and Cabell's, as seen by Charles Alexander at midnight on August 28th. ("The world it went ill with him then, O then!")

For a space, Mrs. Poppy was in shadow. All her plans were endangered; it seemed as if the better part of valor was to "lie low" and say nothing, but, as usual, she found the light.

She told Poppy that he had to run as fast as his good-for-nothing limpy legs would carry him and tell about the scene in the Alexander offices to the grand jury as soon as it met, and before it could be heard from anybody else. He must make a clean breast of the whole affair, throwing all the blame, where it belonged, on Horace Vendire and Arthur Cabell. A little penitence, a little abhorrence, would do no harm; he could not be indicted on his own confession, the Trust officials were already committed to a denial, and Arthur Cabell was dead.

In the mean time he had to report to Devin, and here Poppy very meekly followed instructions to the letter. But Devin was one of those men who, when shown a reasonably straight road, have sense enough to take it, so, in spite of the Poppys he learned that Horace Vendire had started out to see Miss Frewe, and that Charles had also returned to Hillside the same night. From this he deducted — smart man! — that the two men, coming from opposite directions on the same road,

must have met, and that, considering the state of feeling between them something had happened. What, must be brought out later.

Then the grand jury met. The Commonwealth attorney had work for them in the old Vendire case. The twelve, sitting in solemn conclave, heard the voluntary witnesses, and following up their testimony summoned others not so willing. So much was learned that was new to the public, and such obvious conclusions were to be drawn, that the marvel was suspicion had not before taken this course.

It was evident that both men had gone to Hillside; that is, both had started there. They must have met, going or coming. When they met, what occurred?

The discovery of the missing wheel was proved. The boldness of this action excited admiration, for, a bicycle being an awkward thing to dispose of, the adoption of this method by the suspected man was no mean solution of the problem.

The questions were answered with proofs to spare, except for one thing. Why did Mr. Vendire go to the home of the man who had just written him a threatening note? The witnesses on this point were singularly ignorant and unimaginative. It had yet to be settled whether Miss Frewe had seen the missing man or not, and this might put a different face on the matter.

By some sort of chance Miss Frewe's name was mentioned as little as possible.

The Poppys' reason for not referring to her was mercenary. They did some pretty work here in trying to prove that the lovers did not meet that night as Diana was offering part of the reward; but they asserted positively that Charles Alexander had overtaken the man against whom he was so incensed, on the way out, and this is how they proved it:

On the night of August 28th they had attended a German concert at Woodburn. At its close, as it was too late for Mrs. Poppy — then Mrs. Teufelstochter — to return to the country alone, Mr. Poppy went with her, driving her in a buggy. They remembered that on the way out they met a solitary wheelman, but paid no attention to him beyond wondering whether their horse would shy at his red lantern. It was before the storm, and, according to the time at which he was reported to have left the hotel, it could easily have been Horace Vendire. The circumstance had passed entirely out of their minds, and not until Charles Alexander had been discovered riding the dead man's wheel had they ever thought of the lonely traveler on the country road with his red light. Furthermore, Mr. Poppy, after seeing the lady safely to her door, had returned by the same road without meeting horse, man, or vehicle of any sort.

When the two were questioned as to whether

they knew anything else that would lead them to suppose that Horace Vendire went to Hillside when he left the Dinsmore, they again referred to the bicycle. There was but one road to the place; it was admitted that Mr. Alexander had gone, and if Mr. Vendire had not taken that road, how had Mr. Alexander come into possession of his wheel?

As the Poppys left town, the storm was brewing, and they had driven rapidly. As it was, it overtook them. The solitary wheelman must have been forced to seek shelter until it subsided; no one could have stayed on a wheel in that beating hail. Alexander came on after the storm, and, being a lighter man and a better rider, had overtaken him.

It was here asked why, if they passed Mr. Vendire, they had not passed Mr. Alexander also. This was easy. They had not stopped for the storm — having a top to their vehicle, they were able to brave the weather — and the man had.

Then the Poppys were excused, and Mr. James Vendire admitted.

Said that gentleman: "I made a statement at the time of my own trial; shall I repeat that?"

"Have you nothing to add to it?"

Mr. Vendire thought a moment, and then answered: "No, I know nothing involving Mr. Alexander."

[&]quot;Or Miss Frewe?"

"I am in possession of no facts implicating Miss Frewe."

"Has Mr. Alexander in your presence ever referred to the discovery he claims to have made in his office on the night of August 28th?"

"I have not only the whole story from his lips, but I have proofs of its truth in the papers found by me in my brother's room. Mr. Alexander insisted on my comparing these papers with his company's books, and there cannot be the slightest doubt that they were taken from the books themselves."

"Did you not consider this discovery a cause for suspecting Mr. Alexander?"

"Not for a moment have I ever suspected him of anything wrong."

"Did you know of this discovery at your own trial?"

"No, I did not."

"What, in your opinion, was Mr. Alexander's object in concealing it?"

"He did not conceal it. He told my lawyers, and he was prepared to tell all he knew on the stand. Before his name could be reached, the testimony about Craft and Gunn made it superfluous."

"Why did he not tell after the trial, the execution, and the subsequently published confession?"

"I regret to see a disposition to turn a con-

siderate action to my friend's disadvantage."

"Will you be kind enough to answer the question?"

"Certainly. As Mr. Alexander and I were the best of friends, he was loth to defame the memory of my dead brother, not only in the eyes of the world but in my eyes, without apparent necessity."

"What made him change his mind and tell you

privately?"

"He heard that his enemy, Fred Poppy, was planning something that would bring him up before the grand jury, and he thought it wiser to tell me beforehand so that I would not have the first shock hearing it publicly."

"Do you know how your brother's bicycle came into Mr. Alexander's possession?"

"I do not, nor does he." The witness was then allowed to leave.

The grand jury was not altogether satisfied with the evidence so far obtained, though it seemed to point to one thing — the fact that the Poppys had cause for enmity. Advised by the Commonwealth attorney, they summoned Mr. Blount.

Did Mr. Blount know whether Miss Frewe had seen Horace Vendire on the night of the disappearance?

Mr. Blount's face wore an unusually stern, determined look as he replied:

"She probably did see him; but unless you can secure uncontrovertible proof that even if she saw

him she has any knowledge of the manner and reason of his disappearance, it may be disastrous to involve her. Miss Frewe is a young woman in delicate health — weak heart — she may not be able to stand the shock of even an implication, much less an accusation."

"Have you ever attempted to discover what she could tell if forced to appear in court?"

"Of course, I have!" replied Mr. Blount, promptly. "But I was warned by her physician that excitement might be disastrous. I do not wish to commit murder."

Nor did the twelve. The girl should be spared unless her testimony were indispensable; but they asked:

"Do you know of anything that she knows that would materially assist us, and, if so, her reason for silence?"

And Mr. Blount, in close quarters, replied:

"What you want is evidence, and I have none. I have only my opinion. I think it possible she knows things that might seem important to the prosecution, but which, for reasons easily surmised, she has never published. Of one thing, however, I can assure you, gentlemen: timid and fragile and ill as she is, Miss Frewe, at the risk of her life, would go on the stand to-morrow and tell her story from beginning to end, if it became necessary to do so in order to clear Charles Alexander."

In making this adroit speech, Mr. Blount

dropped his eyes, but only for a moment. Then he threw back his head, and, looking squarely at his questioners, he continued:

"Will you permit me to appeal to this body of intelligent men? I know that you are on the eve of indicting Charles Alexander on a minor charge that will lead to a graver one, but on evidence entirely circumstantial. Let me beg you not to do so. There is absolutely no proof that he had anything to do with inflicting bodily harm — if such there were — on Horace Vendire. Sift your facts — facts learned from his personal enemies, actuated by greed, by spite — and you will have left nothing to incriminate."

"You have heard, then, some of the evidence before us?"

"I know no grand jury secrets, but I know certain persons, and what they are chattering about. I know about the bicycle. I will say that even if this flimsy charge be true, you have no proof of further complicity. If Craft's confession was false, then he and Gunn murdered Horace Vendire, and the body was truly identified; if it was true, then no body has ever been found, no proof of his death can be adduced, and there can be no complicity."

Mr. Blount was the last witness examined. The Commonwealth attorney summed up the evidence, and left the room. The voting began.

Mr. Blount had turned the scale.

CHAPTER XIII

TRUE FRIENDS

WHILE enemies were occupied in hatching their brood of evil charges, the Alexanders had been making active preparation to move to Hillside. The weather was still cold and threatening, but in spite of it some feathery greens were beginning to show. Then warm showers and warmer sun woke sleeping nature, and there came a burst of spring.

Charles arrived at home one day, mopping his forehead after a ride through the park, exclaiming:

- "Hillside weather. How soon do we go?"
- "Whenever you think we may," answered Constance, brightly. "I can be ready by Monday, if you say so."
 - "We'll go Monday, then. Hurrah!"

It meant hard work and haste, but Constance feared neither, and Sunday came between with a rest. She felt happy when she reminded them that this time to-morrow they would be dining at their old table in their old home.

- "Shall we be settled enough to dine?" asked Charles.
 - "I fully expect it. Lawson went out yester-

day to clean. She knows about everything, and by the time you get out we shall be well under way for the summer. We are going to have dinner, of course. I do not say it will be elaborate, but I know it will be palatable, and I strongly suspect we shall have asparagus from the old garden—the first of our season. You must promise to leave town early, so that we can take a walk before dark together, for I do not intend visiting one of my favorite haunts until you are with me to share my enjoyment."

"You can count on me," said he, little doubting. Blinky helped actively and aggressively. He bossed the movers, and made it his business to give Mrs. Alexander what he called "a scratchliss move." He went ahead on the first load that started at six o'clock, Monday morning. Constance took the morning stage that left at eight. Charles was to drive Diana out sometime in the afternoon, she delaying to see the last load safely from the flat.

It was one of those beautiful April days that seems a resurrection to all things under the earth. As Constance jolted along in the antiquated relic of a slower age, she enjoyed every turn of the winding road; she was glad of the slowness; it left one so much more time to enjoy. The woods gave forth that indescribable odor that spring exhales after the April showers. Her first glance at Hillside showed masses of dogwood and red-

bud in full bloom, and the sight made her heart dance. The evil days had passed; the grand jury had met without harming them; she felt that life held love, happiness, sweet responsibilities. As she climbed from the stage and walked through the open gates, tears of joy rolled down her cheeks.

Diana had planned a surprise. Richbridge, the old gardener, came to meet her, with a tale of sash, hotbed, and early vegetables; and by his side, giving springs of delighted recognition, was the little fox-terrier, Tat, who had been given away at the former move as being unsuited to apartment house life.

The hours passed. Constance arranged her own dinner table, and it was a dainty sight, decorated with the wild flowers that Blinky had brought her from the pullulating woods. When everything was ready, she sat waiting. Charles was late, although Diana had promised that she would carry him from the shops by four whether he were ready to leave or not.

In spite of her great content, Constance felt tired. She had tried to save herself, but the mere planning and ordering of a move is fatiguing, and she felt the reaction. Forcing herself to quietness, she lay upon a couch in front of her window, where she could see the phaeton the moment it turned in the gate.

She did not exactly sleep, but she must have closed her eyes, for she was roused by a woman's

voice and sprang to her feet, to see Diana, in truth, but in Charles's place, Mr. James Vendire.

All the blood seemed to leave her heart. "It has come," she said. And they nodded.

Then they explained. Although the grand jury had failed to bring an indictment, Roger Perth, a discharged bookkeeper, had in some way learned of the bicycle affair, and on filing an affidavit had induced an empty-headed clerk to issue the warrant for complicity in the Vendire affair. There were reasons for thinking the clerk was acquainted with the suspicions of Devin, and that he had been influenced by remarks that Mr. Claws seemed to have made indiscreetly.

They gave her a note, too precious to read until she was alone — now, she must hear all particulars.

"When can I see him?" she asked.

"To-morrow, we hope," answered Diana. "I left George with him. Mr. Randolph thinks that he will surely be bailed out; your Aunt Sarah came straight to him, ready to furnish any amount. It was too late to settle the matter to-night; there his enemies showed their malice, for the warrant was issued Saturday and could have been served this morning as well as not. He is comfortable, and sends word that you must not imagine that it is going to be anything serious."

"How can it help being serious? You saw him! Oh, why did I leave town!"

"Do not grieve, but be glad that you were not

with him," said Mr. James, "for the first thing he said when they served the warrant was, 'Thank God, we got her away in time!'"

Then they went out, and she kissed her little note and read it:

"It has come, dearest love, when we thought all danger past; and while I am sorry you are somewhat unprepared, yet I cannot be too thankful that you are in the pure country you love, with good friends to care for you. My old bookkeeper was the poor cat's-paw; we can guess who guided. You can help me by sparing yourself all fatigue and worry, so that, knowing you are well, I can give all my thought to my case. They say that we will not be separated for long; that the court will surely take the bail dear Aunt Sarah stands ready to furnish; that, in a few days at most, we can confidently expect a trial.

"But whatever happens, love, practice what we have learned together; take this trouble and look it squarely in the face, and bear it with a soldier's courage. There is no disgrace in being accused of stealing, the disgrace would be in stealing, and the complicity charge is absurd. I hope you are going to let me picture you as sleeping to-night. You know that I shall sleep and dream that I am with you.

" Devotedly,

"CHARLES."

When Constance came from her room, Diana was frightened by her composure. There was too much visible effort at self-control. She asked Diana, in a matter-of-fact tone, whether she herself would be summoned as a witness, and forced her to talk of her own prospect of being implicated in the case against Charles.

Diana answered truthfully, and added, "At present, I have nothing to fear, and my place is with you."

"You are made of better stuff than I," said Constance, "for at first I was so selfish as to forget how you and George must be suffering."

Dinner was ready, and the three sat at the table, so pathetically gay with its decorations. Lawson had brought four plates, and Constance dared not look at the empty one. Before soup was served, Blinky thrust his head in the doorway and summoned Mr. James by violent signals.

"More mysteries," said Constance, wearily.

"Do not worry, dear," pleaded Diana. "Won't you go to your room, and make your-self comfortable on your couch in a wrapper, while I bring your dinner to you?"

"I am going to be good," said Constance, as if she were a child. "I am in your hands to do with as you wish." And she rose and went into her room, without in the least suspecting the anxiety Diana was enduring from something she had seen from the window when Blinky had given his summons to Mr. Vendire.

When Mr. James went outside, he was surprised to see Blount and Trezevant, who had sent Blinky in so as not to alarm the ladies by their unlooked-for arrival.

"I hope you come on good intent," said he.

"That depends on the point of view," responded Mr. Blount. "But we called you out to tell you, and you can use your own judgment about telling the ladies."

The three followed the lawyer to the fatal summer-house, now tipped with a last flush of sun, for darkness had already fallen in the valley. For a few moments no word was spoken, for, as each of the three stood looking, each thought of Horace Vendire viewing this same scene for the last time; but from that common starting-point each went a different road.

"We none of us know where it will end," said the lawyer, and the remark was so apt that both George and Mr. James were startled, "but I believe our friend, Mr. Trezevant, has made a tenstrike."

"Hardly that, I am afraid," said George, modestly; "but I have made a discovery. You tell it, Mr. Blount."

"It is your story, but since you are so shy, I will oblige you. You see, Mr. Vendire, our young

friend here took up the case with a vim: he has more at stake than any of us, so we must lay his success to interested motives, not to our lack of ability."

"Skip that, pard," said Blinky; "a rut 'll throw you ever' time."

Mr. Blount lifted a threatening hand, but without further notice went on:

"The first thing he discovered was a lie that invalidates the whole of the Poppy testimony. There wasn't any concert at Woodburn Hall on the evening of August 28th. A concert was advertised and the press had advance notices which appeared on time next day; but the troupe was delayed by a wrecked engine, and, being unable to reach Lewiston at any reasonable hour, telegraphed a postponement. The money was refunded, and the audience dispersed before half-past eight o'clock. The doorkeeper at the Woodburn knows the Poppys by sight, and he says if they entered the hall on the night of the postponement he did not see them. On account of the threatening weather there were not more than fifty persons in the audience, so that recognition would have been easy, especially as he refunded the money, thereby having a double chance at identification.

"But this is not all," continued Mr. Blount. "Mr. Trezevant made another discovery. In the stirring events and preoccupation following the disappearance of Horace Vendire, Charles Alexander forgot all about having left his bicycle under the shed of the street-car stables. You know he used two wheels."

"I snooped that out," interposed Blinky, the bold.

Blount scowled, and went on: "He kept two wheels, in order to have one always at hand in case he used some other means of transit during bad weather. Until questioned by Mr. Randolph this afternoon, he has never remembered that he failed to claim the wheel that he left under the shed. He says that may sound strange, but it is true."

"In all that happened afterwards, I can understand his forgetting; I also believe it shows how he happened to exchange with my brother," said Mr. Iames.

"How so?" asked the two men, eagerly.

"We know that my brother went to Hillside that night, and that he went on his wheel. As was his habit and Charles's, he probably dismounted at the stable; I was looking in there only this afternoon, and the old gardener showed me the place in one of the stalls where he says the wheels were kept when not in use."

"It's bad for 'em to be kep' in a stable with horses," said Blinky.

"Blinky Blodson," said Mr. Blount, "if you interrupt one more time, straight you go to the house, and you will never be told what we have found out!"

Not seeming to mind, Mr. James continued: "From force of habit my brother put his wheel in the stall — remember Charles's second wheel was already there — then, when remounting in the dark, he it was who made the exchange — not Charles. I think that the wheel that we have to look for by number belongs to Charles."

"Don't you think the court will consider such an explanation?" asked George.

"No," answered the lawyer, "for in that case Charles would have remembered that he left his wheel under the shed, as he would have had only one wheel, whereas he had two—his second one and Mr. Vendire's. Your brother either rode some other wheel that night, or left his here and went off on foot. That is one of the things that has so complicated this case. When I was first called in, all my attention was concentrated on this place and the road to town. But hear the rest of Trezevant's story:

"Fred Poppy hung round that wheel under the car shed for several days, as he went in and out of town. Nobody claiming it, as he wanted it badly, he took it—also badly, as he will soon discover. A clerk saw him and stupidly supposed it was all right; for he says that the man unlocked the chain with an air of ownership and rode the wheel away.

"We made certain of Trezevant's facts, and then got the railway clerk to swear out a warrant.

We are the vanguard for the sheriff, who is coming to arrest the pair for grand larceny; for Blinky borrowed Poppy's wheel 'surreptitious,' and the factory has helped us identify it as the one Charles Alexander left under the shed, thus placing the shoe very successfully on the other foot. for one count. Then we have perjury, concealed weapons, and several counts in reserve. neighbors may sleep in peace, for the Poppys will have something else to occupy them. There was some delay about serving the warrant, and, as such things seem to be in the air, Trezevant and I were afraid the birds might take a notion to fly, and we didn't wish to lose them. If the Poppys should receive any inkling, and leave, we shall send Blinky after them to report."

Then, after agreeing on certain signals, the quartet separated, Trezevant and Blount going down the cliff, while Blinky and Mr. James returned to the cottage.

Standing on the side of the cliff on the Alexander place, Trezevant and Blount had a good view of the Poppy shanty. Smoke was issuing from the chimney, and from time to time, the Poppys were visible at the lighted door or window.

"I wonder why that sheriff doesn't come," said Trezevant. "Do you suppose any hitch has occurred?"

"Devin is the very Old Nick for delays. The Poppys are obviously unsuspicious as yet, and as

the sky looks rather threatening I would suggest that we go to shelter. Shall we go to the village?"

"Hillside cottage is much nearer."

"The nearness of it is, of course, your sole reason for the suggestion. Go yourself. Remembering my position in regard to Miss Frewe, I hardly dare."

"You wrong Miss Frewe if you think she will fail to make you feel welcome. Come with me, and I will show you how forgiving she can be."

"If you think our presence won't alarm Mrs. Alexander unnecessarily, perhaps we had better both go there, as the sky is very threatening. We are in for some nasty weather."

By this time the wind was blowing a gale, and as the two hurried over the ground, rain was beginning to fall. Diana saw them from the diningroom window, and motioned them round to the back porch, where she joined them.

"Come in and make yourselves at home," said she. "I am sure something of importance brings you here; but I cannot stay to hear it, as I have just persuaded poor Constance to go to bed and she wants me to stay near her."

"How does she stand the blow?"

"She is more tractable than I expected, and, so brave! I shan't tell her you are here unless it is necessary, for she must not have anything else to

keep her awake. Blinky and Mr. James are going to take my room upstairs; do you think you and Mr. Blount can be comfortable in the one across the hall? If so, I will call Lawson to get it ready. Of course, you mustn't think of going back to town in all this weather."

Diana went back to Constance, to find her tossing restlessly, but the girl looked so distressed that the older woman controlled herself, saying:

"Don't fret; I shall soon sleep. Would you mind opening the door so that I can see outside?"

"There is lightning — a great deal."

"I know, but I am not afraid. The view from my door is so fine; in a storm it is sublime. See my row of trees on the edge of the cliff waving and beckoning. Those locusts have always reminded me of long-legged children waving their arms in some sort of game. Little did I think I should ever lie here and watch them again!"

Though the storm was raging, Diana was pleased to see Constance watching it so quietly. When she became drowsy, Diana softly closed the door and tiptoed from the room.

To her, the storm was painful almost to agony. It reminded her of that other storm that had so changed her life, of that other man, still unfound; but, smothering her feelings, she busied herself in making the unexpected guests as comfortable as the little house would permit. After they had all

retired she went to her temporary quarters in the dining-room next to Constance, and lay down without undressing.

As she lay staring, through the long hours, she heard no sound from Constance. Occasionally she looked through the door, which she had purposely left ajar, and was thankful to see the pure, still face and the quietly clasped hands. Morning came, she heard the men tiptoe down and out of the house, and about seven o'clock, hearing a movement in the next room, she went in. Constance was awake, but Diana saw her rub her eyes as if her sight were failing; then her face blanched in dismay.

"What is it, dearest?" she asked, alarmed.

"Diana, look! Tell me I am dreaming—that my eyesight is affected—something—anything!" she cried, pointing through the open door and panting in terror. "Do you see anything out there?"

CHAPTER XIV

NEMESIS

DIANA looked. All was quiet; no one was in sight. "What do you think you see, Constance? I see nothing — no one."

"Then I have either lost my mind or my eyesight, for the locust trees are gone."

At this, Diana looked away towards the edge of the cliff and saw, instead of the lacey barrier of trees, the outline of the ground.

"Wait here until I see what has happened," she said, almost as startled as Constance. She ran across the field through the wet weeds, and looked cautiously over the edge of the bank.

Mixed with-masses of rock that lay piled below were the uprooted trees. As she looked at them and at the jagged edge upon which she was standing, she realized what had happened: the ground being soft and spongy after spring thawing and rains, the fierce wind of the night before had loosened the roots of the locusts, which, acting as wedges, had split the bank and fallen, carrying all the outer edge of rock, earth, and undergrowth with them. Greatly relieved, she hurried back to report.

"Only a landslide. After we have breakfasted, I will take you to the edge of the cliff to show you."

"And shall I never see my dear trees again?" asked Constance, ruefully; and Diana sympathized and elaborated, glad to give her something to divide her thoughts.

Here Lawson came in to report that she had given the four guests a light breakfast at day-break, when they had gone off, leaving a note for Miss Frewe.

"You did not know how many angels your little cottage sheltered last night, did you?" said Diana, as she opened the note.

Her face brightened. "It is from George," she said; "they have gone over to the Poppys with the sheriff, who needed piloting. It seems that your bad neighbors are going to have something to think of besides you and Charles. Instead of being at liberty to stir up the law against you, by now they are probably in its clutches themselves."

"Who has trapped them? Of course, not Charles?"

"No, it isn't Charles. George says the clerk at the car sheds swore out the warrant on the advice of the prosecuting attorney; that perjury and other things can be proven, and it is also thought that Poppy, in addition to having told more than he knows, may know more than he tells."

The two then breakfasted, and went over to the scene of havoc. After looking and lamenting, nothing would satisfy Constance but a view from below.

Diana realized that this whim rose mainly from a desire to keep her thoughts off town happenings, but she shuddered when she remembered that in order to humor it she must pass the place where she had walked with Horace Vendire — a spot that she had never since visited, and that she wished never to see again. She put this feeling aside, however, and went across the field, even to the summer-house, where she bravely made Constance rest. Then she heard the barking of a dog, and Tat bounded up the cliff and ran waggingly to them. Behind him came Blinky.

"Where have you been?" asked Diana.

"Visitin' the neighbors," answered the boy. "We had to go over early to ketch 'em at home. They're goin' on a trip. Come along en I'll he'p you over the steep places; they saw you comin' en sent me back to see ef you wanted anything. You'd better hurry, or they'll be took off." Blinky never doubted that they wanted to see the prisoners.

"Are you sure this climb is not too much for you, Constance?" asked Diana.

"Surely not; I am so familiar with the path that I know every pebble. Little did I dream I should ever climb down these hills again! After the place was sold, I could not bear to look on this riotous beauty and feel it was no longer ours. If he were only with us! We are coming to the sweetest part of all."

Diana remembered the place only too well—the beautiful overhanging rock, the trickling spring beneath with its romantic legend—she could see it in her mind with the moon above, the handsome lover by her side, and the snakes in the grass below.

Blinky and Tat had been romping behind, when Constance stopped suddenly, and cried in excitement:

"It, too, has gone! The flat rock — the spring — the whole bank has fallen!" She pointed to the masses of rock, lying in a great pile on the spot where the stream had once trickled between the crevices of the overhanging ledge.

Blinky, who had come up in time to overhear, looked puzzled. "Ain't this always been here?" he asked.

"Of course it hasn't; it used to be quite different. The storm broke it off last night, and further around is still another landslide. The beautiful cliff with the old dead oak is ruined!"

"The flat rock is gone," said Diana, with something of relief.

"Gee whizz! but it must have made a racket!" said Blinky, with a curious look on his face. "Did you hear it fall? I didn't, but I was tired out movin', en slep' like a top."

"I heard many unusual noises last night," said Diana. "At one time I thought to myself how much it sounded as if woodmen were felling trees. This must have been loosening for some time; see how solid and straight the stone looks where it broke — almost as if worn by water."

"As I dare say it was," added Constance. "Charles always said there was a pocket of water somewhere, a sort of natural cistern, that formed the lovely spring — you remember? Whoever drank of the water from your hand would love you till death."

"I remember," said Diana.

Blinky had not lost a word. The trio walked in silence, but found no further damage until they came to the prostrate locust trees lying side by side.

"Like sick children in a hospital," said Constance, ready to cry. "It makes me feel uneasy."

Diana rallied her: "Now you will be forever expecting Hillside to split wide open and swallow us."

"All the same, it gives me a queer feeling to see such things."

The ground was wet, and, in spite of overshoes, Diana was afraid that Constance would take cold, so she suggested retracing their steps.

Blinky had suddenly left them, going in the direction of the Poppy shanty. About halfway up, he met Mr. Blount, Mr. Trezevant, and Mr. James. The sheriff had gone with his prisoners,

but Blinky seemed not to care, and his face wore such a look of suppressed excitement that Mr. Blount immediately asked whether anything were wrong.

Blinky caught one large hand in both of his small ones. "Pard," he answered, sententiously, "ef findin' the body of Mr. Horace Vendire is wrong, there is."

"What do you mean?" asked Blount, roughly, on seeing Mr. James turn white.

"Come 'long en I'll show you," said Blinky and then he led them past the fallen locusts. "Them fell last night," he said; "Miz Alexander hates it awful."

No one responded, and taking them to the ruins of the Devil's Kitchen, the boy stopped.

- "Pard, do you see this flat rock thet we said Mr. Horace en Miss Frewe set on, the night the Poppys spied on 'em?"
 - "What of it?"
 - "Well, it ain't the rock."
 - "Why do you say that?"
- "'Cause Miss Frewe's been down here, en she says it ain't."

Blinky pointed to the masses of stone. "Them's fell on it," he answered, laconically.

"Those stones have been here ever since I first saw the place. How could they have fallen on it? And that uprooted oak has been dead ages."

"Both them ladies has never seen 'em before,

en the oak was dead erready. Miz Alexander ner Miss Di'na hasn't never been here since that night; they hadn't fell then. When did they?"

"August the 28th, the night of the storm," said Mr. Blount, and every word had a double

meaning.

"Impossible!" cried Trezevant. "How could he have been caught in the storm down here! Come, Mr. James, shall we go back?"

"No," said Mr. James, his mouth twisting in anguish, "we will not go back. Please seek help. Every man within call must lend a hand in lifting those rocks, for beneath them I think we shall find my brother."

"But recall the circumstances; why should he have come here?" persisted Trezevant.

Blount interposed, every shadow clearing from his face, as he said:

"I see it all. Immediately before the storm, on the night of August 28th, with the wind blowing a gale, Horace Vendire saw Diana Frewe. He left her, knowing that it was his last visit to Hillside. He thought of his dead father's cane, a possession highly prized by him, and sought the place where he remembered last having had it. He did not find the cane."

"And," said Mr. James, under his breath, while he was seeking it, the ledge broke off —"

"We will lose no time in making sure," interposed Blount. "Trezevant, you go for Rich-

bridge, while I hurry to a place beyond the Poppys where I heard blasting yesterday afternoon. If I mistake not, they are still hauling stone from the quarries, and can let us have men, and, what is even better, a portable derrick."

"I will go with you, Mr. Blount," said Mr. James. Blinky stayed behind.

George sprang up the cliff. Diana and Constance were sitting in the summer-house. When she saw his face, Diana ran to him.

"We are not sure," said he, "but we believe Blinky has made a discovery."

"A discovery! Oh, George!"

"Yes. To-day may see all unjust suspicions forever quieted. But here comes Mrs. Alexander; take care."

"I see news in your face," said Constance.
"He has been released—cleared! Have the Poppys confessed? Did they make the exchange of wheels?"

Diana answered for him; it was best to let her know. "We think that at last we have found — that we know the way Horace — those rocks over the Devil's Kitchen —"

Constance listened in bewilderment.

"They didn't fall last night, as you suppose," said George, but after the first storm — August 28th."

"And none of us who would have noticed have

ever been down since," added Diana. "We moved away, you know."

Constance passed her hand over her eyes. "It seems improbable — impossible!"

"Perhaps we are wrong," assented George, "but we are going to move the rocks on a chance. You must both stay up here. I will report as soon as anything happens. It will take a long time, so don't be anxious." And George hurried away to find the gardener and his son.

Help soon came from every direction, and a silent, waiting crowd gathered below. In less than an hour wheels were heard. Four strong horses came in sight, dragging, on heavy rollers over the rough ground, a large truck upon which was a derrick. Willing hands made ready to begin the work of shifting the huge pieces of stone.

The men went to work with a will. The derrick was placed and began to creak and groan as it lifted the heavy rocks. Those who could not help stood waiting expectantly or talking in hushed tones. It was a solemn task. The strident voice of the quarry foreman directing the work sounded almost irreverent.

The suspense was dreadful. The men occasionally stopped to rest, and it seemed an eternity before the pile began to show the slightest decrease. George could not bear to watch them, for their deliberate motions made him nervous, and one fel-

low with a pipe and a crooked back seemed forever getting in every one's way. He turned again to the varied scene. He noted the river, like a leaden lake in one place, and further on creeping like a gray worm under its three bridges, one white, two red. Was everything creeping to-day? This suspense was killing.

There came a sound of distant vehicles from the turnpike — lumbering farmers in springless wagons. Some black ants at his feet were carrying home materials for a banquet.

"A sign of rain." He pointed. Those workmen were only halfway down. But he felt an imperceptible something come into the fairness. He looked up to the blue sky, and he saw an object floating gracefully in the air. It came nearer, and alighted somewhere down the side of the ravine. And more of the kind circled from afar, and, growing bolder, circled nearer, until the air seemed full of their floating wings.

"The ladies above will be anxious," said Mr. Blount to Mr. James. "Don't you think you had better go up to them?"

And without a word, but with an expression that George could never forget, Mr. James left them.

The workmen now reached the largest slab. It seemed immovable, but all hands lent strength. The big block was grappled, the beam moved into place, the ropes swung taut. Then the wooden

arm creaked slowly round, and a breath changed beauty to abhorrence.

As if human hands had purposely placed it, in a rude tomb below, lay the body of Horace Vendire. He had been pinned down by the rocks falling on one limb, but on the other side masses had fallen on end, building round the fated man a veritable sarcophagus.

Mr. Blount gasped when he saw it. "Good God! Do you suppose he lived after it happened?"

George felt his knees weaken, and he suddenly sat on the ground.

Blount turned, sympathetically. "Go away; you are not needed here, anyhow. Tell his brother. Make the best arrangements you can: bring an undertaker and the coroner, get the ladies into the house; whatever you do, don't stay here!" And George was glad to obey.

The coroner was soon on hand and then it was that Nemesis with her usual irony disclosed her full work; for in the dead man's pocket was found this letter unaddressed but of unmistakable import:

"Those fools muddled things to-night. Tried to see you but you'd gone — Heaven knows where. You are sure to hear particulars so I won't risk them but I have a plan to clear a situation undeniably awkward. From figures that I have not yet had time to fully digest I believe delay would see

In the meantime if any publicity—but I know you too well not to take every advantage of my un rious disappearance. I shall mass to be safe there, but D. will dark as everybody.

"I believe this is the best w place. You will get a letter in a an old friend giving address bu write unless you send by the 'unpapers will tell me all I ought This is the time for disappearing certain event comes to pass you bob up serenely."

"He little knew," said Bloum Blinky had disappeared.

"Even the boy couldn't stand ner, as he helped to place or stretcher under a fair sheet all t murderous stone had spared.

But it was not supersensitiven

realized a goodly sum in tips and no little glory.

Then he sped to the jail, in time to see Mr. Alexander entering a stylish brougham attached to an overfed bay. In the brougham was seated a well-dressed lady whom the boy's quick eye catalogued as belonging to the smart set. In no whit embarrassed, he stayed the whip of the liveried coachman while he told his news, when, to his utter surprise, the fine lady put her head on Mr. Alexander's shoulder and wept.

Blinky turned an inquiring face to the jailer, who stood bowing and scraping near.

"She's white," said the man. "I wish you could see the things she's passed on to the next. I wouldn't be ashamed to put a king in that cell now, ma'am."

The lady dried her eyes, and invited Blinky to accompany them to Hillside. Being tired, the boy put his wheel in charge of the jailer and accepted the invitation. The whip cracked, and the fat bay started off at a gait that showed he was a lady's horse and had never seen a hill.

Mr. Blount was waiting under the wistaria. "I was wrong from the very beginning," he said to Charles as he helped the lady out. But he added, philosophically: "The dead oak is what fooled me. There is no disgrace in being overreached by nature. I can read men, but her book is in too many languages."

And Charles, baring his head, went in.

CHAPTER XV

VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

As the train bore Mr. James Vendire away from Lewiston, in charge of his brother's remains, Charles knew that it carried a friend, and he reflected that this friend was one of the few good things that the Trust had unwittingly brought him. Many evils had come, as his gray hair and wrinkles, not due for many a day, bore witness; but for this one good — the friendship of a true man — he gave thanks. After seeing the funeral train depart, he and George went to the shops with a blank, let-down sort of feeling, the result of the excitement and strain of the last few days.

Then both of the men in extended conference went carefully over the business situation. The conclusion was inevitable: the end was a question of but ten days at the most, for notes would then fall due which, unpaid, would force an assignment. They would be sold out, and they would not have a penny on earth.

Several days after Mr. James reached home, he wrote to Charles telling him of the funeral without pomp or parade, of the departure of his wife and

children for England, where he was to join them later, and concluded with this bit of news:

"All the directors of the three trigger trusts are assembled at the Gerode, and I hear persistent rumors of an early settlement of their difficulties and differences by the formation of a gigantic combination, with a capital of anything between one hundred and one hundred and fifty million. Won't this end your fight? I have ten thousand dollars to invest, and I would be glad to take that amount of your stock as a speculation."

Charles was tempted to accept. But no, it was a drop in the bucket — in a bucket without a bottom. It would not be honest to take it, when he knew it would go the way of all his other good money, so he declined.

But in answer to Charles's refusal came a telegram: "Combination a fact, and a good chance for trade. It may be worth your while to come to New York."

George urged, and Charles yielded.

He arrived in New York early Monday morning, and was met by Mr. James, who carried him to the Gerode to breakfast.

The quiet little hotel was humming with business. Men in groups of two or three were talking mysteriously, separating, running and rushing hither and thither. Lawyers were writing and dictating, telegraph instruments were clicking, stenographers were typing, and the usually dignified servants were in a whirl. The representatives of the three great trigger trusts had taken half the hotel, and were having meetings separately and together. Mr. James had engaged one of the best suites; and when Charles said he could not afford it, he was told that, having come by invitation, he was a guest and therefore had no say in the matter; that since his family had left town, he (Mr. James) had felt so lonely that, for both comfort and convenience, he had taken rooms in the hotel.

Charles wondered how much of this was owing to a desire to help a friend, but was forced to accept the very good things that the gods were providing and be thankful.

When he had shaved, brushed up a little, and breakfasted, Mr. James told him that all the independent firms left in the country were besieging the new corporation, the National Blade and Trigger Company, which was spending millions buying out the most formidable. Seeing this, Mr. James had thought the chances for including Alexander and Company so good that he had telegraphed. The question for Charles to decide was, how much he wanted. Of course, he wished to realize the best sum possible, but it wouldn't do to overshoot the mark.

The two went down to the lobby and waited. Mr. Wheelock passed them several times, but did not look their way, so, of course, the sensitive Charles thought it intentional, and felt that he was going to be ignored as had been the case for the last three months.

Then Mr. James, seeing his dejection, revived his sinking hopes by giving him details of a meeting with Mr. Claws — now president of the new combination — which he seemed to have withheld for just such a purpose. Mr. James had met Mr. Claws accidentally, and while congratulating him on his new honor had asked him why he still kept up the expensive fight with Alexander and Com-(He did not mention to Charles that he pany. had also intimated to Mr. Claws that he was ready to put up considerable money for that firm.) Claws had answered that if Mr. Alexander would come on, they might trade, but that he had now no time to go chasing after firms. Mr. James had then volunteered to telegraph Charles.

"Since hearing this, I believe we really have a chance," said Charles, hopefully.

About this time, Mr. Claws himself appeared with extended palm to Charles, congratulating him warmly on his narrow escape from blighting suspicion, and speaking with feeling of his intense sympathy of the unjustly accused in general and Charles in particular. Then he said that he had tried to find time to write, as soon as he had heard of the arrest, but had been worked day and night, and that he hoped that Mr. Alexander had come for the purpose of making a trade.

Charles replied, with his straight-eyed look:

"Mr. James telegraphed me about the new combination, and thought if I could come on here we might reach some agreement. Do you wish to buy outright, or do you intend to continue the fight?"

"I hope we can manage to trade," said Mr. Claws, "and, if you like, I can make you an offer this evening."

At the hour appointed, the two men went to Mr. Claws's quarters, and were followed by two other directors in the new trust, who were introduced, and nodded carelessly without taking their cigars from between their teeth. Such fine cigars — at least sixty cents apiece! Without preamble, Mr. Claws came right to business, stating the sum he was willing to offer and the conditions under which he would trade. Charles dropped his eyes and dared not look at Mr. James. The sum came within twenty-five thousand of the price he had originally asked. He scarcely dared breathe. He knew he ought to try to hold out for the full first price, but too many things might happen in a prolonged dicker, so, while remembering Mr. Tames's advice, he thought it could do no harm to seem to dally, and said quietly:

"In addition to this offer for the good will, I suppose we will get all that the machinery and the stock in hand will prove to be worth?"

[&]quot;Naturally," said Mr. Claws.

Charles sat, as if considering. He was really trying to look impassive. He glanced up. Mr. Claws was twisting his cigar.

"I accept your offer," said Charles, and he could have shouted it.

Mr. Claws smiled satisfiedly and said he would have a contract drawn up with the conditions they always demanded, and the interview ended.

The payment was to be made in three installments—a check then and there to clench the contract, a second October 1st, and the balance December 31st. Until the last payment, Alexander and Company were to run the works and have all they could make, and Charles immediately foresaw that if the Trust put up prices, as it certainly would, he would realize more than he originally asked.

All this time, Constance was counting the hours. In vain she told herself that nothing that could happen would matter now; her natural buoyancy, after long eclipse, once more asserted itself, and she could not help hoping. She arranged with the telegraph company for a special messenger to bring her any telegram from the village; and when one came Wednesday night, she scarcely dared open it.

Diana waited outside, fearing. Hearing no sound, she stepped into the room. Constance was on her knees, but sprang up when she heard a step, and the two, embracing — and crying, of course — read the slip:

"Home Friday midnightworks sold contract signedam well Charles."

"Of course, a swear word had to get in somewhere," said Constance, laughing hysterically.

George also had had a telegram, and came out radiant. On account of the contract, and for fear of the newspapers, Charles had been unable to telegraph the price paid him, so speculations were many and ranging.

They had become so used to suspense that all three bore the next day with admirable patience. But when she found that the train was two hours late, Constance grew nervous and imaginative. Diana forced her to undress partly and lie down. She looked quite girlish, once more, with her braided hair and the pale blue gown with its bunch of yellow roses at the belt. In the one short day, she had bloomed forth into a semblance of her former self; her sweet cheeks had a soft color, and her eyes all of their old happy archness.

Then came a sound of wheels, and she sprang to her feet. Diana and George let her have the first moments alone with her husband. She sat on his knee, her white arms, with their back-flowing sleeves, clasped round his neck, as she listened to the marvelous tale.

"And how much shall we be worth now?" she asked.

"What is the largest check you ever saw, Constance?"

She pondered. "Twenty thousand is the very largest."

"What do you think of this?"

She took the strip, opened it, and gave a scream of surprise.

"And that is only a third," said Charles.

Then they called in the lovers, who had been having a scene themselves, and Charles proceeded to "shoulder his crutch and show how fields were won."

"Though I can't say won exactly, happy as I am," said he, "for I have let the old firm go and am without an occupation on the face of the earth."

"Who cares?" said Constance. "I have an occupation for you, thought it all out to-day. What is the use of this dear-bought experience if it doesn't lead to some final good? I want you to run for Congress and have laws passed that will effectually prohibit trusts."

"And be defeated by the trusts again? Thank you — a burnt child — I have a better use for my recovered wealth. The first thing I am going to buy is a home for you, Constance. It shall be where you like, but it is going to be square and old-fashioned, with a wide and turnless staircase."

"And what is to be the second purchase?" asked Diana.

"I sha'n't tell you," answered Charles, "but I think it is going to cost about sixty, cents."

Social and again

